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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

URBAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

COATESVILLE CITY HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 11, 2016  
10:00 A.M.

PUBLIC HEARING ON BLIGHT

BEFORE: HONORABLE SCOTT A. PETRI, MAJORITY CHAIR  
HONORABLE BECKY CORBIN  
HONORABLE JERRY KNOWLES  
HONORABLE HARRY LEWIS  
HONORABLE JAMES R. SANTORA  
HONORABLE ED NEILSON

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COMMITTEE STAFF PRESENT  
CHRISTINE GOLDBECK  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HOUSE URBAN AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE  
  
V. KURT BELLMAN  
RESEARCH ANALYST, DEMOCRATIC COMMITTEE

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P R O C E E D I N G S

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CHAIRMAN PETRI: Ladies and gentlemen, we're going to call this informational meeting of the House Urban Affairs Committee for Wednesday, May 11th, 2016 --- oh, I'm sorry, the mic is off.

Let me start over. Ladies and gentlemen, we're going to call this informational meeting for the House Urban Affairs Committee to order. First order of business will be the rollcall. Would you like to call the roll?

REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: I would, Mr. Chairman.  
Thank you.

ROLLCALL TAKEN

CHAIRMAN PETRI: Thank you. For the members and the audience, there are a number of hearings today around the State. And because members are on multiple committees, it makes it difficult for them to be in two places at one time. In fact, a couple of our members may have to leave early because there's a hearing down the road on gaming.

We're going to do --- start with the self-introduction, and then we're going to go to opening remarks. I'm going to have some opening remarks. And I know my colleague, Representative Neilson, will have some opening remarks, and then we'll turn it over to Representative Lewis for opening remarks. Then we'll get into the testimony.

1           We do have slated testimony and time, but that's  
2 really for a benchmark. Don't feel constrained that we're  
3 going to hold you strictly to that time period. So without  
4 further ado, why don't we start with opening comments?  
5 Indicate where you're from, and if you want, some of your  
6 background that may help the audience understand. We'll start  
7 with Representative Santora.

8           REPRESENTATIVE SANTORA: Thank you, Chairman. My  
9 name is Jamie Santora. I am a Representative from Delaware  
10 County, the 163rd District. My background was for many years  
11 in real estate development. Actually, one of my former  
12 colleagues I see out in the audience there, Mike Trio. Hello,  
13 Mike. We worked together at O'Neill Properties in King of  
14 Prussia for many years.

15           I did development work from as far down as Florida,  
16 but primarily in the northeast corridor and got a lot of  
17 interest in what's being discussed here today with development  
18 and blight and everything else. So I look forward to this  
19 hearing.

20           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Knowles, thank you  
21 for appearing. Would you like to give the audience some  
22 background on yourself?

23           REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Yes. Great to be here, Mr.  
24 Chairman. A little bit of a problem finding it, but it's great  
25 to be here.

1 I was a former Borough Councilman, Borough Lawyer,  
2 County Commissioner and recognize the issue that we're dealing  
3 with here today, how important it is, and I look forward to the  
4 testimony of the testifiers.

5 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Neilson?

6 REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: I'm Representative Ed  
7 Neilson. I'm out of Philadelphia County. I'm a former  
8 Councilman of the City of Philadelphia. And I'm going to ---  
9 I'll use this as my time to open up a little bit, ---

10 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Okay. Fine.

11 REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: --- if I may, Mr. Chairman,  
12 and then I'll come back. It's been a pleasure working with  
13 Representative Lewis because some of the issues that he sees in  
14 blight is some of the issues that we see in Philadelphia,  
15 people losing their jobs and the homes becoming vacant, banks  
16 owning it from out of state and no way to get in touch with  
17 them, and there they are just sitting there, sitting there,  
18 rotting away, and making a nuisance for the neighbors and the  
19 community as a whole. It's something that weekly  
20 Representative Lewis and I talk about on the House floor, on  
21 what we've done in the City and how we can help this city along  
22 to fight these issues.

23 And I'd like to also compliment the Chairman for  
24 bringing this hearing to the communities itself because many  
25 times we see, when we watch PCN or we watch the TV, and we

1 see all these hearings being done inside Harrisburg, but  
2 it's better that we have inside the community and we're able  
3 to walk through other people's community, as we did with  
4 Representative Lewis yesterday, how they had us tour and  
5 actually see the issues themselves because not every  
6 community faces the same thing as this community, and it's  
7 something that we have to do as Representatives of the  
8 Commonwealth to get to know each other a little better and  
9 to work together in a bipartisan manner. And it's been a  
10 pleasure serving with him, and I look forward to doing it  
11 some more. And I look forward to a good hearing, Mr.  
12 Chairman.

13 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Thanks.

14 REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: Thank you.

15 MR. BELLMAN: My name is Kurt Bellman. I'm with the  
16 Democratic staff of the Committee. I'm a research analyst. I  
17 grew up in Minority Chairman Caltagirone's District, although I  
18 now live in Lancaster County.

19 CHAIRMAN PETRI: I'm Scott Petri. I'm Chairman of  
20 the Urban Affairs Committee, also Chairman of the Ethics  
21 Committee. My district is in Bucks County and in an area that  
22 has faced some blight as well. I'll come back to some of the  
23 work --- issues that we're working on, but blight in the end is  
24 something you know when you see. And when we took the tour  
25 yesterday --- and by the way, thank you for all the hosts and



1 the information. It was fascinating to see. Sometimes you can  
2 see blight from the outside and sometimes it's more on the  
3 inside as well. But because of the 2008 economy, a lot of  
4 communities have faced vacant properties, which is really what  
5 we're talking about, absentee owners, code violations,  
6 properties that fall into disuse.

7           And the issue of reuse of buildings, restoration  
8 of buildings, becomes really critical, so my background is  
9 --- I've been an attorney, graduated Villanova Law School.  
10 And I have to tell those in the audience it was like a  
11 welcome home tour yesterday because I'm a graduate of  
12 Downingtown High School, 1978. So when I --- and my wife  
13 and I lived our first year of marriage in Exton. But for  
14 the time period from 1978 to about 1985, I was in the  
15 community. I lived there. At the time period I was ---  
16 well, I was always a taxpayer because I had jobs. I worked  
17 at the Exton Mall. I was in and out of Downingtown.  
18 Somebody asked me how often we got to Coatesville.  
19 Remember, there's a strong rivalry, so not too often, but  
20 certainly competed against Coatesville regularly in  
21 athletics and always enjoyed the competition. Oh, I'm  
22 sorry, it was off. So I want to thank personally  
23 Representative Lewis for inviting the community to come.

24           Seeing things first hand on the tour yesterday  
25 was extremely helpful, as --- especially as we hear your

1 testimony, we'll have a better idea of the issues you're  
2 trying to deal with, the specific conditions that exist.  
3 And we saw three communities that have some of the same  
4 problems and some different problems. So I'm anxious to  
5 hear the testimony. I'll have some more opening remarks in  
6 a moment, but let's finish the introductions.

7 Representative --- why don't we go forward? So we'll  
8 continue on to Representative Corbin.

9           REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Good morning. I'm State  
10 Representative Becky Corbin. I represent the 155th  
11 District, which is in central Chester County, east/west  
12 Brandywine, Euclid, Upper Euclid, all the way up to Spring  
13 City, including the Borough of Spring City. So I'm very  
14 interested in hearing a lot of the information we're going  
15 to have today so I can relate it back to my constituents in  
16 Spring City Borough and see what is applicable to that area  
17 as well.

18           I've lived in the Downingtown area almost four  
19 decades, so I'm very familiar with Downingtown/Coatesville  
20 area as it has had its ups and downs over the years. I'm  
21 from --- originally from the western part of the state, in a  
22 steel town, so Coatesville looks very familiar to me, as  
23 Johnstown did at one point. But thank you for all being  
24 here this morning, and I look forward to learning a lot  
25 about the different projects we talked about yesterday on

1 the tour. Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN PETRI: I'll recognize Christine Goldbeck  
3 next.

4 MS. GOLDBECK: Good morning, everyone, and thank  
5 you. I'm Christine Goldbeck, and I'm the Executive Director of  
6 the House Urban Affairs Committee for the Republic Caucus.  
7 It's great to see all of you here.

8 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Lewis?

9 REPRESENTATIVE LEWIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and  
10 thank you, Committee. I really appreciate this opportunity.  
11 And it's a situation where all the communities can't come to  
12 Harrisburg, so we're bringing Harrisburg to the community this  
13 morning to hear all of the issues and make that connection so  
14 we can work together and accomplish our goals in each  
15 community.

16 We started this --- I'm very proud to be  
17 Representative for the 74th District. It's a long district and  
18 quite deep and goes down towards southern Chester County. So  
19 we are a large district, serving about 63,000 people.

20 What we would like to do, once we get there, just  
21 have everybody communicate. This is a friendly gathering. And  
22 just to give you some background as to where we started  
23 yesterday, we began our tour in Downingtown, see the proposed  
24 train station and development site, which includes mixed use  
25 space and parking. We were joined by borough manager, Steve

1 Sullins, president of the Main Street Association; Steve  
2 Plaucher, President of the Borough Council; Chip Gazzerro. And  
3 we also had an opportunity to tour the Chester County Airport,  
4 one of the busiest general airports in Pennsylvania. And we  
5 wanted to look at their recent renovations and also to see the  
6 division of expansion of the airport, including, hopefully, a  
7 tower to minimize safety concerns with hovering and aircraft  
8 traffic in the area. That includes Sikorsky, with their  
9 testing of their helicopters.

10           The committee was joined by Gary Hudson, Airport  
11 Manager; Al Koenig, Chairman of the Airport Authority, Rich  
12 Saylor, member of the Airport Authority; and David Jones, a  
13 consultant. And for those who did not know, the airport in  
14 Chester County, the GO Carlson Airport, serves more air traffic  
15 than Lancaster and Reading put together. So we are a busy,  
16 busy airport, and we need to help them to help our community  
17 because we are the next best thing to the Philadelphia  
18 International Airport. So that is very, very significant.

19           We had a great tour of Coatesville to highlight the  
20 train station project, Route 82 and Route 30, that expansion,  
21 and the gateway at the corner of Route 82 and Route 30. Legend  
22 Properties, they helped us with the tour. The tour included a  
23 visit to the old Lipkin's Furniture, where we were able to see  
24 the Frank Lloyd Wright stairs, that historical site. And  
25 they're going to transfer those stairs to one of the new sites

1 to maintain that dignity of history.

2           We had a brief tour of the cultural society, the old  
3 First National Bank building, and a brief visit to the Iron and  
4 Steel Museum to see the Lukens steel that was recovered from  
5 the Twin Towers in New York City. We were joined by City  
6 Council President Linda Lavender-Norris, City Manager Mike  
7 Trio, Jim DePetris, and Jack Corcoran of Legend Properties,  
8 Colleen Terry and her staff of Eon --- Eon Apartments, and  
9 Andrew Witter of Capital Associates.

10           We also had a great tour of Parkesburg to see the  
11 issues and concerns the borough has with bringing back  
12 revitalization to that borough and also to see some beautiful,  
13 beautiful success stories of buildings that have been restored  
14 to their former glory.

15           We were joined by Jack Assetto of the business  
16 community and Jim Thomas, borough manager. And briefly we  
17 talked with Reverend Mark Beideman of the Parkesburg United  
18 Methodist Church. That's a brief overview. We did not get a  
19 chance to go to some of the communities because of time  
20 restraints. But ladies and gentlemen, I cannot emphasize how  
21 important this meeting is to the revitalization and  
22 reconnection to state government for the communities in this  
23 area. I'm proud that we were able to get here. We can't reach  
24 every community, but the Urban Affairs Committee, of which, of  
25 course, I am a member, we sort of really wanted them to come to

1 see what was happening here in our community, and that  
2 happened.

3 I, at this time --- and we're privileged to be here  
4 in Coatesville. And if I could introduce, Mr. Chairman, with  
5 your approval, the City Manager President for the City of  
6 Coatesville and President of City Council, Mrs. Linda  
7 Lavender-Norris? If you don't mind, if you would take a brief  
8 seat at the table here and tell us about us coming to your city  
9 and make a brief comment.

10 MS. LAVENDER-NORRIS: Good morning, everyone. I'm  
11 Linda Lavender-Norris, City Counsel President. And it's with  
12 great pleasure I welcome you all here this morning. Thank you  
13 for coming out. Thank you for your interest and willingness to  
14 assist all of our communities to come together as one and move  
15 forward.

16 With blight being the focus and acknowledging that  
17 blight is a silent influence and it could be negative, this is  
18 positive coming out of it, so it could be a negative, but I'm  
19 grateful today to say that it's for --- it's positive. I thank  
20 you for your interest, thank you for coming out, and I look  
21 forward to working with you soon on behalf of the City of  
22 Parkesburg as well.

23 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Thank you very much. And I want to  
24 thank you for hosting us. Oh, do you have some more? Go  
25 ahead.

1           REPRESENTATIVE LEWIS: I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr.  
2 Chairman, but I did want to make a point and state if you would  
3 observe and look at this committee. I am so proud to have such  
4 a bipartisan report --- support with Representative Nielson  
5 here, my friends. We eat out often, so we kind of know each  
6 other.

7           REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: Break some bread, yes.

8           REPRESENTATIVE LEWIS: Absolutely. We won't tell  
9 you what our favorite dish is, but I wanted to show that we are  
10 very serious about the revitalization and the rebuilding of the  
11 communities and the --- we are working hard. We don't want to  
12 have you think that you're talking on deaf ears. It's a  
13 process, and right now we are in the middle of the process of  
14 succeeding. And this is a part of that process. Thank you,  
15 Mr. Chairman.

16           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Thank you, Representative. And I'm  
17 going to actually just bully pulpit right on that last comment.  
18 It is a process. And as I was about to say, I want to, you  
19 know, thank you for hosting us and the informative tour that we  
20 had yesterday. What I noticed about you in particular and  
21 others in the group that will testify are the passions you have  
22 for your communities. It's clear that you have a vision, that  
23 you intend to execute on that vision. And the other thing that  
24 I would share, if you don't mind, that you and I talked about  
25 in particular was the need that we work together

1 collaboratively. You can't get it done without us. We can't  
2 get it done without the Federal Government, in some cases. And  
3 all of us need to be pulling in the same direction on that or  
4 we're just going to go in circles.

5           And so the legislative process, for the audience, is  
6 very interesting. I've been on this committee for --- I'm in  
7 my 14th year, so as a first term, second term, third term, I  
8 was on this committee. What happens is we'll examine an issue,  
9 like we are today, blight, we pass legislation that moves the  
10 ball forward, but we always have to revisit. And what we find  
11 are that some of the tools that we provide to local communities  
12 to address the issue work for a period of time. They work for  
13 some. They don't work for all. So if you look at generally  
14 the legislative process, originally we started with bills like  
15 Main Street and Elm Street. And they're great programs, but  
16 you have to have matching dollars. And it doesn't work  
17 everywhere. And it's not always just Main Street and Elm  
18 Street that are suffering from blight.

19           Then we came back and we dealt with absentee owners  
20 and conservatorship, the Blight Act and land banks. And I'm  
21 going to come back to the information on those bills in a  
22 moment. I think it's important that community leaders know  
23 what tools are available under those acts because they're  
24 fairly recent. This term we're dealing with expedited  
25 foreclosures on vacant and abandoned land. What we found is



1 that many times these properties sit for years in the  
2 foreclosure process, which prohibits your ability to deal with  
3 those properties.

4           We also dealt with shortening the time period on  
5 quiet title actions for certain smaller properties so that you  
6 don't have to wait 21 years while the property sits there to  
7 figure out who the ultimate owner is going to be.

8           And the other piece which is really moving through  
9 the Senate is a cultural and historic district bill, the idea  
10 that you need to have public/private partnerships with your  
11 cultural and historic museum resources today. There's not  
12 enough governmental funding for those organizations. So let me  
13 just give you some of the detail and then we'll get right into  
14 the testifiers.

15           Act 135 of 2008 deals with conservatorship.  
16 Community members may petition the Court of Common Pleas to  
17 become a conservator of a blighted property. If the Court  
18 grants the conservatorship, you take control of that blighted  
19 and abandoned property and make the repairs necessary to return  
20 the property to productive use. The conservator could be a  
21 local government group, may borrow and incur --- may borrow  
22 money, incur debt and fulfill its role as a conservatorship.

23           As a conservator, you must maintain safeguarding,  
24 insure the property and develop and implement a final plan for  
25 abatement of nuisance conditions. An annual status report to

1 the Court and parties to the action is required, and the Court  
2 may request updates more than once a year.

3           We also dealt with the Blight Act, Act 90 of 2010,  
4 and that places responsibilities on eyesores on owners instead  
5 of on the public. It requires local government to take action  
6 against the owner. It's a powerful tool that local government  
7 can use to force owners to either fix up or pay up or both. In  
8 other words, it's a way --- a tool that you have to enforce  
9 some of your zoning laws. Obviously, there's a local resource  
10 cost to that kind of action, but it has been found to be very  
11 helpful.

12           We also passed Act 153 of 2012, and that creates  
13 land banks. A land bank focuses on the conversion of vacant,  
14 abandoned and tax delinquent properties into productive use.  
15 They can be pivotal in making property redevelopment more  
16 efficient and affordable and for reserving land for targeted  
17 purposes under local policy and planning goals. Land banks  
18 also clear title to the properties they acquire. And this is  
19 meaningful because clouded titles cause significant delays in  
20 cost to real estate transactions. Act 153 applies to every  
21 county, every city, borough, township and incorporated town  
22 with a population of 10,000 or more or two or more  
23 municipalities with populations less than 10,000 that enter  
24 into an intergovernmental cooperative agreement to establish a  
25 land bank. And we talked about in the current session how the

1 House Urban Affairs Committee reported unanimously House Bill  
2 773, which provides for acquisition of real property by adverse  
3 possession through an action in quiet title after ten years.  
4 Current law on all properties is 21 years other than properties  
5 that fit within this category. And those are properties  
6 one-half acre or less. So that should be another tool that  
7 would enable you to establish ownership of properties.

8           Without further ado, why don't we get into our first  
9 testifier. We have Dave --- I'm going to butcher your last  
10 name, but I'll try --- Sciocchetti?

11           MR. SCIOCCHETTI: Sciocchetti (corrects  
12 pronunciation).

13           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Sciocchetti (confirms  
14 pronunciation). That's easy. I'm sorry. Chester County  
15 Economic Development. So the floor is yours. Take us through  
16 the process and the difficulties you're dealing with.

17           MR. SCIOCCHETTI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and  
18 members of the Pennsylvania House Urban Affairs Committee.  
19 Welcome to Chester County, the 74th District and the City of  
20 Coatesville.

21           We are very pleased that you are here today to  
22 listen to testimony about the issue of blight and its negative  
23 impact on communities in Pennsylvania. My role today is to  
24 kind of set the stage. You're going to hear from a lot of  
25 people who are dealing with the issues of blight. I'm going to

1 talk a little bit about blight, what it is and how it manifests  
2 in communities.

3           As you're certainly aware, blight's a serious  
4 problem facing many communities in Pennsylvania. Blight has  
5 been defined by the American Planning Association in their  
6 policy guide on public redevelopment as underperforming or  
7 obsolete land uses or buildings that exist wherever rational,  
8 private investment cannot overcome market forces. Very  
9 technical. For a less technical definition, everybody these  
10 days uses Wikipedia. Wikipedia describes urban decay or urban  
11 blight as the process whereby a previously functioning city or  
12 part of a city falls into disrepair and decrepitude. I like  
13 that word myself.

14           At its heart, blight is a response to changing  
15 economic realities. It is a process of disinvestment. Areas  
16 and neighborhoods that were stable gradually become  
17 unstable. Jobs leave an area and there is less demand for  
18 homes in that area. Values decline. Houses deteriorate.  
19 There is less interest in the area and a downward spiral is  
20 underway. All of that is a good description of blight in a  
21 textbook manner, but I will tell you that it is too  
22 antiseptic and too clinical to describe the reality of  
23 blight to those who are experience --- experiencing it, both  
24 individuals and communities.

25           Blight is a disease on the community. It is

1 insidious in how it seems minor at the outset but grows into  
2 something that changes whole neighborhoods. It can start  
3 for different reasons and manifest in many ways. At the  
4 macro level, blight can begin when the economy of an area  
5 starts to move in a negative direction. Companies start to  
6 leave and they are not replaced. Empty buildings start to  
7 appear. Those with an ability for relocate begin to do so.  
8 Those left behind struggle with a new negative dynamic.

9           At the micro level, blight might start with a  
10 homeowner who loses their job or it might be someone with an  
11 underwater mortgage. It could be a prolonged illness. It  
12 can be anything that limits the homeowner's ability and  
13 desire to care for their home. It might start with high  
14 grass and weeds. It can move to peeling paint and broken  
15 windows. Leaks can start to damage the structure. At some  
16 point the owner abandons the property. It may or may not be  
17 subject to bank foreclosure proceedings, depending on what  
18 it's worth. It becomes tax delinquent. It does not sell at  
19 tax sale. It may or may not be sold at judicial sale. It  
20 is vandalized. Copper is removed from the building. It  
21 becomes home to vermin and may be used for criminal  
22 activity. It continues to deteriorate until it must be  
23 demolished as a public safety issue. The local community  
24 may or may not have the funds to demolish it.

25           While this process of the individual property is

1 unfolding, the adjacent properties are experiencing a  
2 decline in the value of their properties. They may have  
3 problems getting property insurance. They begin to question  
4 whether they should continue to live there. People on the  
5 block are concerned that nothing is being done to address  
6 the problem of the deteriorating property. They may decide  
7 to sell now before their property value declines. Investors  
8 see an opportunity and start to buy at discount. They often  
9 seek to reassess the property to a lower value. The entire  
10 neighborhood is now under siege by the forces that  
11 contribute to blight.

12           The community as a whole now has a problem  
13 neighborhood that can exert negative influences on the  
14 entire community. It can now be perceived as less desirable  
15 to new residents and new businesses. Now, while not every  
16 community experiences blight will develop the full set of  
17 outcomes described above, variations of the sequence of  
18 events have played out in many Pennsylvania communities.  
19 Too often the community does not recognize the problem until  
20 it has reached an advanced state.

21           Equally likely, the community does not have the  
22 funds, manpower or tools to address the problem in a  
23 meaningful way. While Pennsylvania has taken many steps to  
24 create new tools, Chairman Petri described some of them, and  
25 options for dealing with blight, there are certainly more

1 that can be done.

2           Today you will hear from a range of individuals  
3 who are battling blight in large ways and small. From code  
4 enforcement to the use of incentive programs, to responding  
5 to foreclosures, communities in Chester County and the 74th  
6 District are engaged in a range of activities to combat  
7 blight. We hope that you will find the testimony today  
8 helpful as you work to identify legislative responses to the  
9 challenge before you. Thank you very much for the  
10 opportunity to address you here today. I'd be happy to  
11 answer any questions if there are any.

12           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Any members have questions? It  
13 looks like Representative Santora ---.

14           REPRESENTATIVE SANTORA: Thank you for testifying  
15 today. We are looking into a lot of things continually in  
16 Harrisburg. We have a lot of blight bills, as Chairman Petri  
17 had said, coming before our committee and have taken very  
18 seriously. In fact, Christine, what's the official name of  
19 that committee I just --- the Blight Task Force or ---?

20           MS. GOLDBECK: Yes, Bipartisan, Bicameral Blight  
21 Task Force.

22           REPRESENTATIVE SANTORA: So that's something that  
23 I've been involved in now because of a bill that I was very  
24 involved in that just went through the house. You're  
25 absolutely right. We've got to be able to give you the tools

1 from the state level on certain items. One of the things that  
2 I see is --- and this is one of the things my --- our bill just  
3 addressed, was that things happen when a property is ready to  
4 close. And it's been a real problem because what it does a lot  
5 of the times is prevent it and it's the only time that you, as  
6 a municipality, seems to have certain authorities that you can  
7 get things done. And we've got to give you those tools ahead  
8 of time so that you can go after it before it does become a  
9 problem, like you said. You start seeing the lawns growing big  
10 --- or high and then, all of a sudden, a property is empty,  
11 then the next one's empty. It's --- you've got to realize it  
12 at that point in time and have the resources to be able to  
13 address the issue.

14 Another issue I find is that we've got an issue with  
15 District Judges --- not picking on them, but they slap people  
16 with a \$25 fine and they laugh and go back and do nothing about  
17 their property. So we've got to start holding some feet to the  
18 fire there as well in order to be able to prevent that. So I  
19 thank you for your testimony. I think it was very insightful.

20 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Corbin?

21 REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 Thank you, Mr. Sciocchetti, for your testimony. I know from  
23 our past experience we've had a lot of conversations about the  
24 Keystone Opportunity Zone, and I wanted to know if you would  
25 comment on the success of the KOZ in battling blight here in



1 Chester County or other places and is there anything we can do  
2 to improve on that program?

3           MR. SCIOCCHETTI: And within Chester County I'll  
4 give you the best example of how KOZ has --- has contributed to  
5 economic success. In Lower Oxford Township Tastykake had a  
6 plant and they were contemplating moving that plant out of  
7 state. We put together a team with the state government and  
8 local governments and we identified the KOZ as a tool for an  
9 adjacent piece of property. And we were able to use that tool  
10 to convince Tastykake to stay --- Flowers Food, I should say, I  
11 believe that is the corporate name. And they added about  
12 90,000 square feet and added, at this point, well in excess of  
13 a hundred jobs, when it could have been another vacant, empty  
14 warehouse-type building. And I will tell you, if you do get  
15 the chance to go down there to the Tastykake property, the  
16 manufacturing process for baking bread is extremely  
17 interesting. It's a great tour.

18           In a prior incarnation, I spent a long time working  
19 in the City of Chester, and the Keystone Opportunity Zone was  
20 an extremely successful tool there. We took an abandoned power  
21 plant on the waterfront that had been sitting there for 20  
22 years vacant --- and someone mentioned Brian O'Neill, Mike  
23 O'Neill's brother, who was the developer who came and said  
24 that's not an empty power plant. That's 400,000 square feet of  
25 Class A office space. And using the KOZ and some other

1 incentives, we were able to turn that building literally from a  
2 contaminated property with PCBs and other problems into really  
3 an amazing office building. So it's a tremendous tool.

4           Now, we'll tell you it doesn't --- doesn't work  
5 everywhere. You have to be able to find an economic use for  
6 the property, and that's the biggest challenge, but it does  
7 create an incentive to go places where developers might not  
8 otherwise go. So again, I think that --- certainly we've used  
9 it effectively in a number of situations. I think it's a great  
10 opportunity to drive development to where it needs to go, which  
11 is usually what happens in these distressed communities.  
12 They're distressed because economics has moved away from them.  
13 And a KOZ can be a tool that drives it back to that community  
14 and slows and maybe halts the process of decline that is  
15 associated with blight.

16           REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Thank you. That's exactly  
17 the explanation I was looking for. Thank you.

18           CHAIRMAN PETRI: I want to thank you for your  
19 testimony. One other thing I think we ought to all be  
20 cognizant about that would help Pennsylvania tremendously, and  
21 that would be the availability of cheap energy. When you talk  
22 about these plants, the game changers that we see around the  
23 Commonwealth are where facilities can get cheap energy  
24 available, they not only stay, they expand. And so I think it  
25 becomes incumbent upon us at the state level to try and figure

1 out how to deliver this asset we have in the ground in  
2 Pennsylvania to Pennsylvanians for their use. Take the Lukens  
3 property as just an example of --- I'll call it the former  
4 Lukens property, to be technical. If that steel plant operator  
5 would have cheap energy available to it, it could expand its  
6 --- its operations dramatically.

7           It's interesting, in my own local town there's been  
8 a property that has been abandoned for probably 12 to 15 years  
9 while they tried to get development approvals. Going to  
10 Representative Santora's previous comment about sometimes we  
11 need to cooperate a little better and figure out how to move  
12 things along. And every survey of the community said what  
13 should --- what do you think the primary use of this property  
14 should be. And invariably, it always came back to that which  
15 what it was, which was a car dealership, a car dealership that  
16 went under because of all the plethora of problems that Pontiac  
17 and other dealers had. But in the end, everybody thought that  
18 it should be a car dealership. And like the Lukens property,  
19 you know, I'm looking at it, thinking yesterday as we're doing  
20 the tour, boy, that can be a this, that can be a that. The new  
21 --- we find out the new owner has restrictions on what they'll  
22 allow to go in there, which may not be fair to the community  
23 leaders who are trying to redevelop that property, but is the  
24 reality of the economics. And so how do they advance their  
25 plans of restoring Coatesville, making things better, when they

1 have an owner that's compliant and doesn't really want to allow  
2 opportunities. We have this in the Fairless Hills plant in my  
3 area. There have been thousands of people who had ideas of how  
4 they would use the property, but U.S. Steel was --- has been  
5 able to block it. So that becomes another little issue.  
6 Again, to make the point, if you had cheap energy, though,  
7 maybe its former use could be a use again and what a shot in  
8 the arm that would be for Coatesville and in creating jobs.

9           So I want to thank you for what you do. Your role  
10 is important. Most businesses have no idea where to go when  
11 they want to develop a property. Those that are watching at  
12 home, your local Economic Development Council is the place to  
13 start so that you can find the properties and identify how you  
14 want to proceed.

15           So we'll go to our next panel, which I believe is  
16 the City of Coatesville, Michael Trio, the city manager, and  
17 Sonia Huntzinger, economic development advisor. Welcome, and  
18 you may proceed when you're ready.

19           MR. TRIO: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members of  
20 the Committee. My name is Michael Trio. Pleasure meeting  
21 everybody yesterday on the tour. It was very interesting and  
22 helpful to us.

23           I'm here this morning to talk to you this morning  
24 about the challenges and the opportunities facing the City of  
25 Coatesville, including our current planned efforts to address,

1 manage and eliminate blight in our community.

2           As the city manager and executive director of the  
3 Coatesville Redevelopment Authority, I'm also a certified land  
4 planner, and I've been between public service and private  
5 sector business about 30 years of experience. This has been  
6 --- experience has been important in understanding how to  
7 balance the needs and constraints of the City and its taxpayers  
8 with the need to constantly work to attract new revenue,  
9 development and jobs here. I'm also responsible for the  
10 day-to-day management of the City --- City operations and  
11 functions, including overseeing staff, budgeting, accounting  
12 practices, enforcement, utilities, external communications and  
13 guiding land development activities. So it's a --- it's a busy  
14 town and we're really trying to move forward with all these  
15 activities.

16           My planning and development experience is an asset  
17 when I'm working closely with City Council and local  
18 development agencies and stakeholders, such as Sonia, to  
19 develop programs and systems to advocate for the attraction and  
20 reinvestment to the City as well as supporting plans to nurture  
21 existing business and community organizations.

22           Our opportunities. At first glance, it may be  
23 difficult to see Coatesville's distress and its plight as one  
24 of the Commonwealth's most distressed municipalities and most  
25 in need of revival. The City has a strong manufacturing and

1 industrial heritage, and we experienced our heyday in the mid  
2 '60s and '70s. Like many of the Commonwealth's older core  
3 communities, the industries that once fueled the City's  
4 economic engine, steel, heavy manufacturing, fabrication, are  
5 no longer present or limited in the City. And the decline of  
6 the City's core industries has led to a corresponding decline  
7 in housing stock, residency, home ownership and the resources  
8 available to fund basic needs, such as education, public works  
9 and infrastructure improvements, all challenges that we have  
10 daily in the City. This lack of resources is visible in the  
11 deteriorating condition of much of the City's housing and  
12 commercial stock.

13           Not much new construction has occurred in the City  
14 for many decades. There's been some --- some projects through  
15 the City in the last ten years or so, but very limited.  
16 Similarly, redevelopment of the City's existing buildings and  
17 properties is stagnant. One may look at the City's present  
18 physical and social conditions and write off the future as  
19 hopeless.

20           However, there are other city blight --- however,  
21 where others see blight as decline, I see opportunity for  
22 revival, reinvestment and revitalization. Coatesville is the  
23 only city in Chester County, one of the county's --- most  
24 affluent counties in the country. We are surrounded by some of  
25 the wealthiest individuals and communities in the Commonwealth

1 and in the nation. With some careful planning, bold vision and  
2 outside investment, Coatesville can revive its productive past  
3 and once again and become an important link in the chain of  
4 redevelopment in Chester County. Our city offers a great  
5 opportunity to showcase the commitment of the county, the state  
6 in reinvesting in this hidden gem. By putting legislative and  
7 financial tools into the hands of the City and its leadership  
8 that can be used to rebuild the City's infrastructure, create  
9 jobs and help Coatesville become self-sustaining and vibrant  
10 again.

11           Another comment about the City, our city has great  
12 bones. That statement is a common thread through discussions I  
13 have with many people in many sectors. The industrial history,  
14 architectural character, building scale and construction  
15 materials were built to last. Coatesville is a textbook  
16 walkable community. The grid streets and connectivity to all  
17 portions of the City is a great advantage for complementary  
18 mixed uses, service businesses and residential development.  
19 Utility services exist, very --- very important in  
20 redevelopment and are in close proximity to --- to the  
21 properties that they service, resulting in low cost --- low  
22 cost in connections and construction.

23           The City has created a system of public parks and  
24 facilities and public pools, which are now uncommon in many  
25 other municipalities of our size. We have density of 7,300

1 persons per square mile, and these facilities are important and  
2 the City feels it is important to maintain and expand to serve  
3 our residents. This also prevents an obvious first wave of  
4 reinvestment opportunities that will help retain existing  
5 residents and attract new residents to invest, live, work and  
6 play in our community. Coatesville is very fortunate to be  
7 located directly in the Keystone Corridor.

8           Some of our problems. As mentioned before, the  
9 blight has resulted from deferred maintenance through lack of  
10 human and capital resources, overburdening and inconsistent  
11 building and development controls that have happened over the  
12 --- over the years. Filling the gap with local matching  
13 requirements for programs like Community Development Block  
14 Grant money, it's very difficult for the City to match the  
15 required funds to do projects. Therefore, we usually have a  
16 shortfall and it's difficult in finding either development  
17 entities or other sources of public money to fill those gaps.

18           Some of the things we've done in the City and what's  
19 on the horizon, the projects that are to your left, my right,  
20 along the side wall of the room indicate --- are projects that  
21 are currently underway either in planning or starting planning.  
22 Third Street and Train Station project, which is the major  
23 PennDOT project that we witnessed in our tour yesterday between  
24 third and fourth avenues, just south of the existing trolley  
25 tracks. That will be an \$85 million investment ultimately by



1 the State and the City to provide a new train station, a  
2 600-car parking structure and various opportunities for  
3 development, either through private sector or possible  
4 institutional uses.

5           The DEPG/Legend Properties was mentioned earlier in  
6 the introduction. This is the \$25 million re-investment by  
7 Legend Properties at the intersection of Route 82 and Lincoln  
8 Highway. That is augmented by a \$1.2 million public project to  
9 reconstruct the intersection at First and Lincoln. So that's a  
10 significant public investment that the City has --- has  
11 committed to for the project. The project will create about a  
12 hundred new jobs, raise the City's tax base and demonstrate a  
13 visible sign of faith in the City's revitalization. The  
14 project would not be possible without the infusion of state  
15 funding, due to the large gap in market rate versus rent ---  
16 rent versus the cost of redevelopment. Projects like this are  
17 not possible without public/private partnerships and public  
18 subsidies, unfortunately. The City participating in through  
19 involvement of the Redevelopment Authority to its own --- to  
20 its own conveyed properties, through eminent domain proceedings  
21 that enable the intersection and parking structures to be built  
22 on time and with the support of grant applications, a true  
23 public/private partnership.

24           There's also opportunities with the City  
25 Redevelopment Authority. The RDA owns and manages a land --- a

1 land and building portfolio and continues to market sites,  
2 including the former GO Carlson sites commonly known as the  
3 flats, which is a northwest intersection of Route --- of 1st  
4 Avenue and Lincoln Highway. This site has the largest land  
5 area and is identified as our biggest potential opportunity for  
6 major economic impact. There has been a series of projects  
7 proposed that, due to the economic conditions of the mid 2000s,  
8 were unable to move forward. The City has considered a series  
9 of potential uses, which require stacking of public resources.  
10 About 45,000 square feet of downtown commercial space which  
11 provide a level of stability for the market and the opportunity  
12 for the local businesses to grow are also managed by the  
13 Redevelopment Authority. Through local economic development  
14 and marketing programs expanding the City, the City is  
15 spearheaded by the 2nd Century Alliance.

16           Out-of-the-box revenue, which are things that the  
17 City is looking at to augment other ways to be entrepreneurial,  
18 including more activity and revenue to the City. Using our  
19 currently-owned assets and sharing services could be a win/win  
20 for the City. An example is the relocation of the Coatesville  
21 Magisterial District Justice Court to City Hall, hopefully  
22 within this year, which will provide a foundation for needed  
23 capital improvements not only for the District Court facility  
24 but also the City Hall and allow some new means of revenue  
25 production for the City, the 30-year-old City Hall Building and

1 developing an up-to-date efficient court facility, implementing  
2 innovation and inter-municipal cooperation in energy  
3 programming and green sustainable projects. It was mentioned  
4 earlier the importance of energy projects. The City has  
5 entered into an agreement with a company which will be  
6 developing energy for one of our properties. So that's ---  
7 that's in process.

8           Expansion of recreation and cultural activities to  
9 attract interest and become a magnet to the urban live, work  
10 and play lifestyles. Concerts, parades and a proposed  
11 Coatesville Vintage Auto Grand Prix are an example of these  
12 programs unfolding in the City. So the City is working hard to  
13 market themselves and to provide an opening --- and open  
14 opportunity for new business.

15           What we have implemented. We sort of coined the  
16 term called green tape. No more red tape in approvals process,  
17 green tape. In fact, I heard someone today describing no tape.  
18 But we do regular outreach just to represent the real estate  
19 management groups, developers and businesses to keep  
20 organizations updated through ongoing outreach and meeting  
21 processes. There's local organizations such as the Housing  
22 Association that we do meet with and others on an as-needed  
23 basis. We started regular staff plan/development review  
24 meetings with developers and entities looking to redevelop in  
25 this City. And that's one of the cases where we're turning red

1 tape into green tape.

2           We've upgraded and enhanced code enforcement  
3 management, including the analysis and cataloging of vacant and  
4 dilapidated structures. That's where our next stage of  
5 implementing hopefully these programs to either acquire,  
6 demolish or find better use of those properties. We  
7 streamlined our land development and zoning process to identify  
8 and prevent unknown roadblocks to projects. I think  
9 Representative Santora mentioned that. That's been a case  
10 where properties could go to closing, there could be a permit  
11 or an issue with DEP or another reason to come in and stop the  
12 project.

13           What we need. I lost my last page here.  
14 Legislative actions to revise programs like CRIZ regulations  
15 that serve our population level, and allow Coatesville to  
16 participate and leverage its future tax revenues to accelerate  
17 redevelopment. I think that's a population issue and we very  
18 much appreciate that that be looked at. Streamlined agency  
19 communication, expedite permitting and construction in areas  
20 with PennDOT, with DEP and DCED, where coordination or  
21 communication between those agencies and the City would be  
22 expedited would be very helpful. This would be --- would  
23 provide realistic funding limits. As I mentioned earlier, it  
24 would provide realistic funding limits to allow for actual  
25 construction costs without shortfalls, to match local match

1 funds, things like that.

2           A quick clearinghouse process for state and local  
3 legislative enforcement of blight remediation and condemnation  
4 support for the City and the RDA, which many --- many of the  
5 programs have been daylighted today.

6           Align state building codes to meet current year  
7 standards under the UCC Act. Currently --- currently the  
8 regulations are inconsistent and not cycled together, so we  
9 have inconsistencies with permits and folks who come into the  
10 City and want to do redevelopment. Renovation of buildings  
11 have issues with code enforcement consistency.

12           So with all that said, in conclusion, distressed  
13 municipalities, such as Coatesville, have all the ingredients  
14 of success at their fingertips, a solid infrastructure base, a  
15 population ready to be trained to work, access to public  
16 transportation, proximity to major markets. What we need are  
17 tools to enable us to leverage our assets in the most flexible  
18 way possible. That may mean relaxing regulations or opening up  
19 programs like CRIZ to more municipalities, streamlining onerous  
20 regulations and reviews, and allowing expedited reviews at DEP  
21 and other agencies, where many projects bog down and languish  
22 for months and years, slowing the --- slowing development,  
23 additional funding programs that can be directed towards  
24 improving infrastructure in our downtowns, such as funding H2O,  
25 PennWorks and the IFIP program, funding Keystone Communities,

1 which was mentioned earlier, to its maximum level, to do the  
2 most good for the most communities. A mouthful, but I think  
3 that the City is very appreciative of the work of the  
4 Committee. And thank you for being here today and thank you.  
5 Any questions, I'd be happy to answer at this time.

6 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Ms. Huntzinger, did you have ---  
7 are there comments you wanted to make before we get to  
8 questions?

9 MS. HUNTZINGER: Yes.

10 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Why don't we do that? Go ahead.

11 MS. HUNTZINGER: Mr. Chairman, community members,  
12 thank you for the opportunity to talk to you this morning about  
13 investment in blighted properties in generally depressed  
14 communities. My name is Sonia Huntzinger, and I'm the economic  
15 development administrator for Chester County's Department of  
16 Community Development.

17 My focused area is the City of Coatesville, and I  
18 speak on behalf of the Coatesville 2nd Century Alliance, a  
19 group of community stakeholders representing both the public  
20 and private sectors, all deeply committed to enhancing and  
21 encouraging investment in the City of Coatesville. And I'm  
22 before you today to discuss some of the advantages that come  
23 from investment in blighted properties in a distressed  
24 community.

25 As you're keenly aware, abandoned properties in both

1 residential and commercial neighborhoods have significantly  
2 negative effects on not just adjacent properties but entire  
3 neighborhoods as the broken window theory takes hold.

4           Vacant and abandoned properties present overwhelming  
5 challenges to small financially strapped communities like  
6 Coatesville. Vacant buildings dampen local economies, depress  
7 property values, set the stage for criminal and vagrant  
8 activity, and place significant cost burdens on the local  
9 government. However, vacant properties can actually become  
10 opportunities, potential assets in neighborhood stabilization,  
11 downtown revitalization and community growth initiatives as  
12 they become renovated and reoccupied.

13           As members of this Committee, you already know that  
14 real estate development and investment is trending back toward  
15 our urban cores. Developers may not recognize the monikers  
16 Smart Growth, New Urbanism or Sustainable Development, but they  
17 do recognize the national trends that are primarily driven by  
18 the millennial generation are shafting back to our walkable,  
19 urban communities, environments where homes, jobs and social  
20 networks are all in close proximity.

21           In fact, AAA, the National Auto Association, reports  
22 a 23-percent decline in miles driven per year by drivers aged  
23 16 to 34. This is a clear indicator that this generation  
24 prefers car-optional environments where public transit is  
25 available and alternative transportation can be supported and

1 encouraged.

2           This tees up an incredible opportunity for  
3 developers to invest in urban centers like Coatesville, where  
4 the public transit infrastructure is already in place and  
5 easily accessible. And it's these communities like Coatesville  
6 that are home to a concentration of vacant and abandoned  
7 properties, an inventory of potential sites ripe for  
8 redevelopment. Often owned by the municipal --- municipality's  
9 Redevelopment Authority, these vacant and abandoned buildings  
10 offer more affordable acquisition costs to the developer along  
11 with a willingness on the part of neighbors and local officials  
12 to support the private investment in improvements, thereby  
13 creating the public/private partnerships that support community  
14 development and neighborhood improvement.

15           Equally attractive is the established  
16 infrastructure. Existing roads, sidewalks and utility access  
17 significantly reduce development costs. And as mentioned  
18 before, the public transportation systems are well established  
19 in urban communities.

20           Developers that invest in blighted properties can  
21 find themselves on the ground floor of a community's  
22 revitalization, and in some cases, be the catalyst for a  
23 neighborhood's renaissance, spurring more development and  
24 ultimately increasing property values and the tax base in  
25 improving the overall quality of life. But even given the



1 potential benefits of investing in the rehabilitation of these  
2 properties, the reality is that they don't always pencil out.  
3 Blighted properties can require extensive resources to bring  
4 them into code compliance. At the local level, municipalities  
5 can employ tax incentive programs, such as LERTA and ReTAP to  
6 encourage private development of these blighted properties.  
7 And the counties have tools at their disposal as well.

8           Coatesville currently has a project, which you've  
9 seen yesterday, the DEPG Legend property. In the pipeline it  
10 is benefiting from true public/private collaboration with the  
11 City, the county and the developer, all working to ensure the  
12 project comes to fruition. It is, however, still reliant on  
13 other sources of capital and applications have been made to the  
14 Commonwealth for assistance through the RACP program. This is  
15 just one example of the importance of the programs that  
16 Harrisburg can offer to ensure that our small urban centers  
17 throughout the Commonwealth have the tools, such as Keystone  
18 Opportunities Zone, Tax Increment Financing, Historic Tax  
19 Credits and CRIZ, to leverage with the private sector to ensure  
20 --- encourage the redevelopment of these vacant and abandoned  
21 buildings.

22           These tools combined with programs like Keystone  
23 Communities will give us the resources we need at the local  
24 level to address blight, enhance our communities and ensure a  
25 prosperous future and improved quality of life for our

1 residents. Thank you for your time and your interest.

2 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Knowles is  
3 recognized for some questions.

4 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I  
5 didn't really --- I didn't really get into --- I don't even  
6 know that I mentioned the district that I represent. I  
7 represent the 124th Legislative District, which is a portion of  
8 Schuylkill, Berks and Carbon County. When I was assigned to  
9 the Urban Affairs Committee, I kind of scratched my head  
10 because the largest community that I represent is the Borough  
11 of Tamaqua. That's 7,000 people. The smallest community that  
12 I represent is the Borough of Lenhartsville, which is 166  
13 people. But --- and the reason I say that is, as I'm looking  
14 through --- I'm looking at Parkesburg, which is somewhere less  
15 than 3,600, Coatesville --- I don't have any cities where I  
16 come from, but the City of Coatesville is 13,000-plus. And  
17 Coal Township is somewhere around 14,000. My point is that I  
18 quickly recognize that blight is not just a Philadelphia  
19 program, and it's not just a Reading program, it's not just a  
20 Hazleton problem. It is a problem to many of these small  
21 communities that I represent. But I just --- maybe everybody  
22 knew that, but I just wanted to get it onto the record.

23 In terms of a question, Jamie had mentioned about  
24 District Justices. We have made an effort --- and by the way,  
25 the Senator --- my Senator, Senator Dave Argall, is like the

1 champion of blight. This has been something that he has been  
2 focusing on for many, many years. And one of the things that  
3 we did is we met with the local DJs, with the local District  
4 Magistrates to impress upon them how bad this is. You know,  
5 this is not just something we can sweep under the rug.

6 I talk about the fact that I was a cop back in the  
7 '70s and I remember in those days people used to drive cars and  
8 they would drive them into the ground, and then when they were  
9 done, they would just let them park and then we would tow them  
10 away and we would junk them. Well, that's what people are  
11 doing with houses today. That's what they're doing with  
12 houses. They get every buck that they can out of that  
13 property, and then they just let it go, and then we, as  
14 taxpayers, end up picking up the tab. And that's not fair. We  
15 need to hold property owners more accountable.

16 Now, my question is have you guys done anything in  
17 terms of meeting with the local DJs and, without mentioning any  
18 names, what is their attitude in terms of the problem? Do they  
19 recognize the seriousness of this problem and do --- I know  
20 we're doing some things in terms of legislation of blight, but  
21 do we need to do more and are they doing as much as they can?  
22 Boy, I really put you on the spot.

23 MR. TRIO: Well, I've been here since August,  
24 Representative, and we've done --- we started in-house. We  
25 really started in-house with our Code Enforcement Department.

1 There was issues that had to be addressed that were ongoing,  
2 and that's on our list to do, to go to the Magistrate. And  
3 he'll be in-house with us here next year and to impress on him  
4 to, you know, make our fines stick, because as you mentioned,  
5 we could have a property owner that has multiple --- dozens of  
6 violations they'll pile them up and wait until they have a  
7 single hearing and then the District Justice may --- you know,  
8 the goal is compliance always, as you know. You want to get  
9 them to be in compliance. And if they can do that and not  
10 issue fines, it's well and good, but I think --- but I think  
11 that we have to be able to cover our expenses, because we do  
12 have staff.

13           We do have properties that have to be maintained.  
14 And you know, people say --- we have comments from certain  
15 constituents. Well, you know, let it go. You know, we have  
16 --- but that --- that retards our --- our ability to bring new  
17 business in and new people because if we don't keep our city in  
18 good shape and enforce these regulatory requirements, then it's  
19 not going to be a good face. So we're trying to do a balancing  
20 act where we meet with --- with the groups that are in control,  
21 basically rental properties outside of our commercial district.

22           But you know, homeowners the same thing and try to  
23 impress upon them that, you know, we take pride in the City and  
24 when we have to bring the hammer, per se, we could work with  
25 the Magistrate and make sure it gets --- it's in there. So you

1 know, it's an ongoing process. We have two DJs that serves the  
2 City and, you know, it's --- it's --- you can't deal with the  
3 same personnel the same way, and I think that that's something  
4 you have to feel as you go through that process. I hope I  
5 didn't --- I hope I didn't create more questions than I  
6 answered.

7 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: No. If I may, Mr.  
8 Chairman, the point that I would make is the group that we've  
9 put together in terms of every District Justice in Schuylkill  
10 County, as well as some members --- you know, some local  
11 officials in smaller communities, we met with them. And quite  
12 honestly, they're pretty busy guys and they're dealing in many  
13 cases with much more serious things than blight. And I think  
14 sometimes it can kind of get lost in the shuffle, but I will  
15 tell that it was advantageous to everybody concerned that we  
16 sat down with them and we got feedback from them. And they  
17 told us, hey, look, you may need to do this for us. And we  
18 would say to them, you need to take this a little more serious.  
19 But there's been a group put together and it works very well,  
20 and they've at least recognized the seriousness in terms of  
21 blight. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 CHAIRMAN PETRI: And just to add to Representative  
23 Knowles before we move off that topic, a novel approach I saw  
24 in one of my own communities, the District --- local District  
25 Justice imposed a maximum fine and said, but if you make these

1 corrections within 30 days and show me proof, I'll reduce it to  
2 the minimum amount. So going to your point that a property  
3 owner has money for one of the two, paying the fines or fixing  
4 the property, and this was a way to encourage it. I recognize  
5 Representative Santora.

6           REPRESENTATIVE SANTORA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
7 Thank you for your testimony. Mike, this town sounds a lot  
8 like the town we walked into many years ago, Conshohocken, a  
9 lot of blight, didn't know where they were going to go, worried  
10 about money, didn't have the resources. And now Conshohocken  
11 is thriving. And the secret to Conshohocken was they allowed  
12 the developers to think outside the box. And that is key here  
13 as well. You've got to let your real estate developers ---  
14 they're the experts --- think outside the box. It may not fit  
15 within what you're used to. And I say this in --- you know,  
16 with all care and love on it. It's what made Conshohocken  
17 successful.

18           Conshohocken is plentiful with money at this point.  
19 They've got a lot of good development, a lot of new, young  
20 families moving in. And in fact, they're now looking for more  
21 affordable housing because the values of what I would call  
22 little 1,100 square foot, 900 square foot row homes are now in  
23 the high twos, high threes, and even in the \$400,000 marks.  
24 It's a good thing, and they're adjusting.

25           They didn't lose sight on who they were, a mill town

1 on the --- on a hill. They still have that, a lot of old  
2 families still there. But if there's anything I can say is let  
3 the developers do what they do. Let them think outside the  
4 box. And you've got to get your zoning team and everybody else  
5 to think outside the box. It's extremely important because  
6 they'll bring it to the table for you. They'll bring things  
7 that you're not expecting and --- you know, walking trails and  
8 little things that don't cost a ton of money but really make a  
9 difference.

10           And I got to --- I drove through town this morning.  
11 I got here about an hour and a half early, and I just took a  
12 ride around to understand it a little better. And you do,  
13 you've got a deep history, and you can sell that history. So I  
14 know you can do it, Mike. And your entire team I'm sure  
15 is ---.

16           MR. TRIO: Appreciate that. So thank you.

17           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Corbin?

18           REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Mike, one of the things you mentioned was filling the gap for  
20 local match requirements for Community Development Block Grants  
21 and other grant opportunities. Can you comment on any status  
22 of what available funds there are and any progress that you're  
23 having in Coatesville for meeting some of those demands?

24           MR. TRIO: The two major --- thank you for the  
25 questions. The two major issues we have with --- with matching

1 funds, our projects right now at First and Lincoln, is the  
2 intersection improvement. There's a CRB Grant that was issued  
3 from the county of about \$700,000. That project is about a  
4 \$1.2, \$1.3 million project. So we have to identify follow-up  
5 money either through CRP, which we have applied for, or other  
6 opportunities either through --- from the City's standpoint,  
7 it's just from our general fund. We don't have any other  
8 opportunities in matches.

9           For the other public project that we're doing is the  
10 garage and will support the redevelopment of the business  
11 district. Once again, there's a CRB Grant for that. Once  
12 again, it's short. It's a \$500,000 grant. We're applying for  
13 a second grant. But the cost of that construction could be as  
14 high as over \$2 million. So besides the infusion of private  
15 money --- but as was mentioned earlier, the stacking of funds  
16 because the investment level and the risk that needs to be  
17 taken by the private sector, there's always a gap. And we have  
18 to find a way through our legislation, I think, to really be  
19 realistic or target. Unfortunately, some municipalities,  
20 cities need it more than others. You know, I think there may  
21 be some better sliding scale that will allow additional lesser  
22 matched amounts for some of the more needy areas. And that's a  
23 big problem. That's a big problem, but ---.

24           You know, block grant money, same thing. There's  
25 very high matching requirements, up to 50 percent in some



1 cases. And to attract development, people want a clean, easily  
2 navigated city, well lit. You know, our sidewalk systems are  
3 in need. So those are the kind of things that you don't ---  
4 you have to provide good public works --- good public works and  
5 repair those. The funding is not there at this time, so we're  
6 trying to find ways to get these programs.

7           And people --- many times you get a comment, why  
8 don't you just go get the grant money. Well, the grant money  
9 is not free money. It's got a significant local match. So  
10 it's hard to say, well, we can't get the grant money because we  
11 can't get the grant. Well, people don't want to hear that, so  
12 it's very --- for a constituency to hear that, they don't  
13 realize that there's a significant amount of general fund money  
14 or other tax money needed to either be raised in their taxes or  
15 somehow moved around in the budget to allow for that. So  
16 that's where I see a big gap in the matching funds. There's  
17 two examples I can think of off the top of my head.

18           REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: I appreciate that. What I'm  
19 hearing is more think outside the box as far as matching grants  
20 ---

21           MR. TRIO: Yeah.

22           REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: --- and the financial  
23 considerations or levels that need to be obtained for you to be  
24 able to use the grant money.

25           MR. TRIO: Exactly.

1           REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Thank you.

2           MR. TRIO: And what we have done --- that's why one  
3 of the reasons we are looking to do a project with the county,  
4 because there's an --- there's a --- where we have a public  
5 works project, where we have shared facilities for a win/win in  
6 county and a city operation and there's infusion of revenue  
7 that will help, you know, augment not only our building, but we  
8 have a city-wide energy program where we're replacing all of  
9 our --- all of our street lamps. So from a health, safety and  
10 welfare, that's all tied into that one project. And we were  
11 able to do a project with Johnson controls to integrate  
12 building, street lighting, some additional video systems to  
13 support our police department. So we sort of brought all those  
14 entities together to --- for a win/win on that. So there's ---  
15 there's certainly innovative ways and out-of-the box ways I  
16 think the City's trying to --- trying to move forward.

17           REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Get around that. Thank you.

18           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Lewis?

19           REPRESENTATIVE LEWIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I  
20 just want to make a comment. And just listening and knowing  
21 what I know and just looking at you, Ms. Huntzinger and Mike,  
22 you're creating a powerful team here with the 2nd Century  
23 Alliance and the City of Coatesville. And I see you as  
24 expediting some of these programs that we're trying to  
25 implement. And I've heard CRIZ mentioned a couple of times and

1 this type of thing. And we really have to talk about that, but  
2 it seems as though with collaboration --- I'm very proud that  
3 we have the two of you working together to sort of expedite  
4 some of the issues that we are talking about currently today.  
5 And we would like to continue the dialogue with the City and  
6 helping you. We're doing what we can to help, but I see a  
7 strong revitalization and unity in this community. I just  
8 wanted to make that statement, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

9 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Okay. Staff?

10 MR. BELLMAN: I'm very interested in the programs  
11 that you're talking about for upgrading the train station.

12 MR. TRIO: Yes.

13 MR. BELLMAN: As a daily Keystone Service commuter,  
14 I'm keenly aware that far too many Amtrak trains pass right  
15 through Coatesville and don't stop. Are you getting any sort  
16 of commitment for some help between PennDOT and Amtrak to  
17 increase the frequency of stops as you upgrade this station?

18 MR. TRIO: Well, as part of the overall package, the  
19 study, that's part of the analysis that's being provided by  
20 DVRPC, the ridership. They're doing ridership studies, freight  
21 studies, in order to determine --- of course, we want  
22 additional stops, want to make sure that happens. But as part  
23 of the overall package and comparatively to the design and  
24 development stage, they're doing ridership surveys. So that's  
25 really the mechanism that we understand that will augment

1 additional stops and additional service.

2 MR. BELLMAN: Okay. This will be an incentive to  
3 them to look favorably upon adding stops?

4 MR. TRIO: Yes.

5 MS. HUNTZINGER: There are also some initiatives  
6 under way currently to improve the existing train station  
7 building and to get some signage out on the Lincoln Highway  
8 that there is, indeed, a train station and some additional  
9 marketing locally that the train station is there and it is  
10 running.

11 CHAIRMAN PETRI: I'm going to take the opportunity  
12 as Chairman, take a little prerogative to have --- to have some  
13 comments, some questions and maybe even just a little bit of  
14 discussion or comments to my fellow members. First question on  
15 CRIZ. As city manager, how important do you think that is?  
16 And I'm going to preface it with something that you need to  
17 know.

18 MR. TRIO: Okay.

19 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Many times in Harrisburg we hear  
20 comments about programs, and this is one that we always have  
21 opinions. And there is an opinion that exists in Harrisburg  
22 that this program maybe shouldn't even be funded, but certainly  
23 shouldn't be expanded. So give us some help on that. Why is  
24 that important to you?

25 MR. TRIO: Well, I think that they've done a great

1 --- the skinny, or in the vernacular, on the project is how  
2 well it has done in Lehigh Valley and how it's helped the  
3 Allentown and Bethlehem area. And it would be, you know,  
4 transferrable to other urban areas like Coatesville. I know  
5 Harrisburg had discussed it one time, but I think that it would  
6 be a great incentive program to help fill our business base and  
7 bring business back in. We could have utilization of what we  
8 have. And I'm not an expert like on CRIZ, but I think that  
9 would be another mechanism based on population we could  
10 utilize. It seemed to be --- I don't want to say a quick fix,  
11 but an expedited rebirth of that region, and I thought it would  
12 be helpful as an opportunity here. I know Sonia has worked  
13 with that program in the past, and you know, that's really one  
14 of the key discussions. Whenever we talked about our  
15 redevelopment ideas, that's --- that's something that's really  
16 come up in the forefront.

17 MS. HUNTZINGER: Sure. I think that, yes, we did  
18 have --- the neighborhood improvement zone did have a  
19 significant impact in Allentown. And I am from York. I just  
20 spent about six and a half years in York on an application for  
21 the CRIZ, which is a little bit different than the NIZ  
22 legislation.

23 I think what it does is it affords us just one more  
24 tool in the arsenal that we have at our disposal to encourage  
25 and incentivize development. And I think the more tools you

1 have, the more developers have the confidence to come in and  
2 get your city in a different --- a different light.

3           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Thank you. And moving on to the  
4 next topic, but for my colleagues, you know, the purpose of an  
5 informational hearing is to carry information both ways. And I  
6 think we just heard at least from this city's point of view how  
7 important that program would be, and maybe we can all stomp out  
8 that fire when we hear people say, oh, you know, it's not a  
9 good program or whatever.

10           Just interesting comment that you made in your  
11 presentation, Mr. Manager, about the need for cultural aspects  
12 of this city. What has been the reaction of the community and  
13 council to the idea of carrying the cost of some of those  
14 programs on the City --- you know, you're struggling. You've  
15 got fixed dollars. One tendency would be we're getting down to  
16 the bare bone of our budget. We're not going to do any of  
17 these. But to me, you seem to imply at least, if not actually  
18 state, that you thought that that would accelerate the problems  
19 you were having instead of trying to stave them off. So has  
20 the community embraced that as an important part of your  
21 budget?

22           MR. TRIO: Well, yeah. It's also a stressed part of  
23 our budget. It's an important part we need to find a way to  
24 fund. As I mentioned in my presentation, we have, you know,  
25 pools in the City, which, for a population this size, is very

1 unusual. They don't have any. They just stopped creating  
2 municipal facilities. But through the years it's been a very  
3 important facility in the City. Council has been very hands  
4 on, on recreational and programs for the City's youth. So  
5 that's integral. We've carried that for some years with, you  
6 know, very poor equipment, which caused us many extra dollars  
7 because of the maintenance. But we're looking at it as part of  
8 our out-of-the-box process to try to find some partnerships to  
9 go ahead and move forward to get some of these facilities up  
10 and going quickly. So it's not just a tax requirement that  
11 we're trying to work with these, you know, other agencies and  
12 entities to help us fund those things. So I mean, it's  
13 discussed, you know, foundation work. We have slash pads that  
14 we want to get up and going. We need them for this --- right  
15 away. These are emergency situations for us and we're working  
16 to find that ---.

17 CHAIRMAN PETRI: The final comment I would make  
18 based upon the tour I took yesterday, the information we saw, I  
19 think those two rail projects for Downingtown and for  
20 Coatesville are key. And I hope there's a reporter in the room  
21 because this message is going to be for reporters. You know,  
22 the story can't always be about the bad. It's got to be ---  
23 and Representative Lewis made this comment yesterday. He's  
24 very confident about what can be, and he wants to talk about  
25 the positive. That was the comment he made and it struck me

1 last night as I was relaxing and about to fall asleep, how  
2 important that is.

3 I remember traveling through Downingtown frequently  
4 with the paper mill. Now, to me, as a young man of 16 or 17,  
5 that paper mill was already an eyesore. But from a city  
6 revenue point of view, you know, obviously jobs, a tax base,  
7 now it's a real eyesore and --- and it's a danger. You had ---  
8 you made the same comments yesterday about the danger of all  
9 these vacant buildings to public health and safety and the  
10 burden on the tax rolls.

11 So what we have to do is be very collective and  
12 confident in our message that the project in Coatesville, the  
13 project in Downingtown will be successful. They are the right  
14 locations. It's exactly what young people want. They don't  
15 want them out in the middle of some --- nowhere, where I think  
16 --- maybe it was you, Ms. Huntzinger, talked about getting in  
17 the car and driving. They want to be able to walk to that  
18 facility and how logical that is. We got to be singing out of  
19 one choir book about the confidence we have that this project  
20 will go forward. That's the only way this is going to go.

21 So thank you for your passion and your testimony. I  
22 know from that signal we're behind schedule. I hope that  
23 hasn't ---.

24 REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: Mr. Chairman, if I may?

25 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Yes. Go ahead. Mr. Neilson?



1           REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
2 One quick question.

3           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Sure.

4           REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: And I want to use my  
5 previous experience with working with government on codes and  
6 implementing the UCC that was passed in '99. It took us four  
7 years to get it up and running. And I heard you mention it,  
8 and as the Chairman indicated, a lot of us are on different  
9 committees. I'd like to know how that's impacting you, because  
10 it's something that we hear a lot? And just real quick,  
11 because I don't want to get off the subject ---.

12           MR. TRIO: I'll give you a real quick example. We  
13 have a fire regulation, for instance, that when conversions  
14 occur in residential properties, if there's a third floor,  
15 there has to be egress. I believe there's a discrepancy in the  
16 UCC. And hopefully --- I don't know it by heart, but I believe  
17 that there's a discrepancy in egress that one year, I believe,  
18 one of the earlier years allows for a drop ladder, for  
19 instance. And another year requires actually the installation  
20 of a fire escape. Now, I may be getting it backwards. I  
21 apologize.

22           REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: Yeah. It happens a lot.

23           MR. TRIO: The problem is, is you implement --- the  
24 implementation years aren't the same year, so we have --- we  
25 generally have arguments with landowners that that's not the

1 current code. This is the current code. I'm going to fight  
2 you in some form or another. So I think it's just whether the  
3 state is behind --- I understand the state doesn't adopt it.  
4 If it's a 2013 code. It takes some time for the state to catch  
5 up. Where if it was --- if it was more expeditedly  
6 adopted ----.

7 REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: Yeah. Well, what they do  
8 is they actually give everybody time to get certified and up  
9 their certifications. Even if they change it one day, you  
10 can't be changing it the next because you don't give the people  
11 that have to enforce it and your local enforcement. So you  
12 usually run from two to three years behind, depending upon the  
13 municipality. But as the municipality, I just wanted to let  
14 you know that you can make local ordinances and strengthen your  
15 code. They just have to be approved by the Department of Labor  
16 and Industry. So you can make the code more stringent. You  
17 just can't take regulation off it. I think that's a tool that  
18 people don't really have in their box.

19 MR. TRIO: Right.

20 REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: And it goes up through the  
21 UCC Committee, and they --- they're usually pretty good at  
22 expediting that. So you can make your local codes stronger  
23 through regulations that you adopt locally, something the City  
24 of Philadelphia does quite often. We have some areas we're a  
25 little stronger than others, and we try to adopt it. That's

1 something that you can do. And thank you for your testimony.  
2 Thanks for coming today.

3 MR. TRIO: Thanks for your questions.

4 REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: And thanks, Mr. Chairman.

5 CHAIRMAN PETRI: We'll next recognize the Caln  
6 Township Panel, which is Joshua Young, a Commissioner, and  
7 Kristin Camp, the township solicitor. Any time you wish, you  
8 may proceed.

9 MR. YOUNG: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members of  
10 the Committee, fellow citizens and City Council. My name is  
11 Josh Young, and for the last 11 years I've been honored to  
12 serve as Commissioner for Caln Township. I was asked to give  
13 testimony on one aspect of Caln Township's revitalization.  
14 Over the past few years, fellow Commissioners, business leaders  
15 and citizens have complained about the boarded-up and vacant  
16 buildings on Lincoln Highway as it passes through our township.  
17 And for years of blaming it on recession and other issues,  
18 myself and Commissioner Cruz said let's stop complaining and  
19 let's actually do something about it. So we established the  
20 Lincoln Highway Redevelopment Task Force.

21 The Task Force included members of business --- of  
22 the business community, Planning Commission, Board of  
23 Commissioner and fellow citizens. Our approach was threefold.  
24 First we set out to fix our zoning codes, which our Solicitor  
25 Camp will inform you about in a minute. Second was to

1 establish a tax incentive program, which I will testify on in a  
2 second. And our last approach has been to use the existing  
3 zoning laws to force property owners into fixing up their  
4 buildings. One example of that, in the last year, to my left,  
5 Harry Lewis's Chief of Staff is also our Board President. We  
6 --- when she was first elected, we --- we were complaining that  
7 people would just board up the buildings and walk away. So we  
8 said we were no longer going to tolerate that. We began  
9 posting those buildings for demolition and which, in the Code,  
10 we would have to wait one year to then go to Court and ask for  
11 that.

12           Now, along Lincoln Highway in Caln Township, much of  
13 that is in the flood plain. So if those buildings were  
14 demolished, there would be no ability for the property owner to  
15 then rebuild those buildings the way they existed today. So  
16 once we did that, we've had many people actively list those  
17 properties and actively try to sell them so that we didn't get  
18 to the process where --- where they would be demolished. So  
19 our three --- three-prong approach has begun to really start to  
20 work.

21           Today I'll focus on our use of the Local Economic  
22 Revitalization Tax Assistant program, or LERTA. Our task force  
23 looked at multiple different tax incentive programs and settled  
24 on LERTA for several different reasons. First, LERTA only  
25 abates taxes on increase --- on the increase in assessment

1 value after construction. For example, if a building has a  
2 building assessed at \$1 million and after expansion or  
3 renovations the building is then assessed at \$2 million, the  
4 taxing authorities would abate the additional \$1 million. So  
5 the existing taxing authorities would continue to get the tax  
6 under the existing million but would be abating the new  
7 construction and renovation.

8           LERTA also gives us the flexibility to choose the  
9 length of the program, a five or ten-year abatement program,  
10 along with the percentage of abatement. So if you chose the  
11 five --- five-year, you could go with a higher percentage that  
12 the abatement would knock off every year. In Caln Township's  
13 case, we took a ten-year approach with a ten-year abatement  
14 that faces additional assessment in ten percent a year.

15           Following --- if you follow my previous example,  
16 that property owner would see their first year tax bill based  
17 on \$1 million and could expect about a \$100,000 increase to the  
18 assessed value over that ten-year period, saving the property  
19 owner about 50 percent in taxes on the increased value over the  
20 ten years, which I have included our fact sheet as Exhibit A.

21           The second reason we chose LERTA is that it only  
22 required the municipality to pass a --- pass a resolution  
23 declaring the selected area as a deteriorated area and would  
24 --- would require no state approval. If you look at Exhibit B,  
25 that has that included. Our task force felt this would be the

1 quickest way to implement an incentive program. Each taxing  
2 authority would then be required to pass an ordinance or  
3 resolution --- resolution adopting the municipality's LERTA  
4 boundaries and abatement schedules, which are Exhibits C, D and  
5 E. And that actually has a list of every single tax parcel  
6 included in the LERTA district. But this is really where we  
7 began to run into trouble and our speedy proceed really hit ---  
8 hit the brakes.

9           Township administration had met with the county and  
10 school district staff and administration to discuss our  
11 thoughts and their thoughts on LERTA. The county was extremely  
12 helpful and excited with efforts. The Coatesville Area School  
13 District Administration was also interested in our proposal,  
14 which would increase rateables and revitalize the area. When  
15 our task force and the Chester County Economic Development  
16 Council, who had been assessing --- assisting us with the  
17 process, presented the proposal to the Finance Committee of the  
18 Coatesville School District, we were met with heavy opposition  
19 from just one member. Over the next year, we attended meeting  
20 after meeting after meeting after meeting where this one board  
21 member refused to believe our numbers on growth, that tax  
22 incentive programs attract businesses, and his direct quote  
23 was, no business ever locates because of tax --- taxes. Our  
24 efforts --- or that our efforts were even --- even worthy of  
25 --- of this program. The school board at the time refused to

1 put the proposal up for a vote until we could satisfy this one  
2 member's request.

3           After a year of trying, it became evident that we  
4 would never ever satisfy this member's concerns because he just  
5 didn't believe in the premise of tax abatement. And in the  
6 end, we began to lobby at single board members to try to force  
7 a vote so that we could move forward. And after a year of  
8 delaying our process, that board member ended up voting for the  
9 thing anyway.

10           And the third reason we chose LERTA was the ease for  
11 the property owner to apply. It's simply an application, which  
12 is Exhibit F, to be included with your building permit, which  
13 is Exhibit G. And that application is sent off to the County  
14 Assessment Office for approval. And that's the only  
15 requirement necessary to receive the abatement, which makes it  
16 very attractive to the --- to the property.

17           Caln Township has received --- has received great  
18 press about our efforts to proactively address the commercial  
19 corridor, which is Exhibit H. The Delaware Valley Regional  
20 Planning Commission has also developed a document. And they  
21 actually had a bus tour where they gave this document out and  
22 they brought people with the Chester County Economic  
23 Development Council and drove up and down Lincoln Highway  
24 showing them the properties.

25           And I guess I want to stress how important

1 revitalization to Lincoln Highway is. So Coatesville School  
2 District is nine municipalities. Caln Township is one-third  
3 that total assessed value. So if our business district begins  
4 to sputter and isn't moving forward, our --- our school  
5 district continues to suffer even more.

6           To date we have --- in my testimony I said three.  
7 We now have four completed LERTA projects. We have three  
8 projects that will either receive approval tomorrow night, two  
9 of them, or --- and one has already received approval. We have  
10 two other projects that just were in the vicinity and decided  
11 to reinvest but were not eligible for LERTA. And I think that  
12 was based on the aggressive stance that we took in posting  
13 those buildings for demolition. And I was briefed last night,  
14 there's possibly four to five other people talking about  
15 different projects in Caln Township as well.

16           So before I put this together, I asked our task  
17 force members if they had any recommendations that this  
18 committee could propose to improve the LERTA law, and everyone  
19 agreed that giving the taxing authorities a set time limit to  
20 act so that future municipalities do not have to wait a year or  
21 more for approvals. A 90 to 180 days for the taxing  
22 authorities, once they receive the application, to act would  
23 be, we believe, more than fair enough for them to carefully  
24 study the proposal and make changes and act on that proposal.

25           The proposal came from --- the other proposal came



1 from the school district itself, which was to --- we did  
2 incorporate into our ordinance. Under --- in Exhibit C, you'll  
3 see under Section 2, subsection (e), that if a property was  
4 demolished after the effective date of the ordinance, the  
5 abatement would only begin on the portion of the pre-demolition  
6 assessed value. So you can't then --- after the Act was  
7 passed, you can't just go demo a building and then get the  
8 vacant ground assessed value. And we thought that that was  
9 fair and we ended up incorporating that into our ordinance so  
10 that people don't try to game the system.

11 I understand that you did drive down Lincoln Highway  
12 yesterday and you've seen some of the successes and some of the  
13 struggles we've continued to have and know that many men and  
14 women over the past several years have put in hundreds, if not  
15 thousands, of hours to make our community better. As my  
16 Representative, Representative Lewis, said earlier, this is a  
17 proud area. We helped build the 20th Century. I think we can  
18 help build the 21st Century, but we need both Harrisburg and  
19 Washington to help us do that.

20 Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I thank  
21 you for your time and for coming to our region. And I'll be  
22 happy to answer any questions.

23 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Ms. Camp, would you like to add  
24 anything?

25 MS. CAMP: Sure. I am a municipal solicitor for

1 Caln Township. I also serve about ten other municipalities in  
2 Chester County, the Borough of West Chester. I have done some  
3 work for Spring City. I also have been fortunate enough to  
4 work with the Coatesville Redevelopment Authority on the train  
5 station project, and our firm was instrumental in acquiring ---  
6 there's 21 properties and 18 or 19 of them have been acquired.  
7 And two had to go through the condemnation process. We're  
8 still waiting for the results of that. So I am familiar very  
9 much with the City of Coatesville.

10 As far as the LERTA statute, I was --- until Caln  
11 brought it to my attention, I didn't know it existed. I've  
12 been practicing municipal law for 20 years and none of the  
13 municipalities that I represent or that I'm familiar with  
14 really take advantage of LERTA. I think a lot of --- it's  
15 difficult sometimes to get the school district onboard. And as  
16 Commissioner Young indicated, it was a marketing effort and a  
17 lobbying effort. The Caln Commissioners just wouldn't take no  
18 for an answer from the one School Board member they're talking  
19 about. Something to take back, you know, to your constituents  
20 and your municipalities that you're representing is to really  
21 look into what benefits LERTA can provide.

22 It's a very easy statute to administer. Quite  
23 honestly, and some of my testimony I was going to talk about  
24 the nuts and bolts of it. You know, it's an ordinance. It's  
25 not very difficult. You pass a resolution designating the

1 blighted area. You pass an ordinance that is almost verbatim  
2 from the State's statute. There's not a lot of changes that  
3 you need to make. You get the County Commissioners and the  
4 School District on board and it's --- you know, luckily,  
5 Chester County has a great tax assessment department that's  
6 been assisting with the implementation of the program. I'm not  
7 aware of any hiccups or hurdles along the way. And I think it  
8 has incentivized some property owners, if all things being  
9 equal, you come to a municipality that has LERTA, you may  
10 choose to locate your business or to redevelop your property in  
11 that district, as opposed to somewhere else that doesn't offer  
12 that tax incentive.

13           One of the things I do want to speak about, though,  
14 and it was mentioned before, is thinking an open --- or having  
15 --- the city manager talked about, you know, being open ---  
16 having open ideas as far as zoning regulations. And that's  
17 something else that this Lincoln Highway Task Force, in  
18 addition to LERTA, another piece of the --- another part of  
19 what they worked on was the zoning ordinance. So you're  
20 probably familiar with the state law, the municipalities'  
21 planning code, that authorizes municipalities to create a  
22 general interest.

23           I think municipalities that have blight within their  
24 communities need to open that zoning ordinance. Some of the  
25 ordinances were written in 1980. Zoning ordinances have to be

1 able to evolve with the time and with the market conditions.  
2 And Caln Township's task force looked at the zoning ordinance  
3 and realized that it was serving as a detriment and not an  
4 incentive tool for properties that were blighted and properties  
5 that maybe were smaller that were up against the railroad  
6 corridor here and needed to have flexibility in how they could  
7 be redeveloped either with what uses would be allowed or how  
8 the area involved standards or design regulations could be  
9 implemented.

10           People don't realize how expensive going through a  
11 zoning process can be. If your property can't meet the rules  
12 for that particular district and you have to go with a zoning  
13 variance, typically the application is \$1,500 to \$2,000.  
14 Typically you have to hire somebody like myself to go and  
15 represent you to, you know, carry the burden. So I think just  
16 keeping, you know, in the back of your mind that if you change  
17 the zoning to incentivize blighted properties to have more  
18 flexibility and to allow the governing body to grant that  
19 flexibility within the ordinance rather than having to go  
20 through a zoning hearing process. And that's what Caln did.

21           I mean, he gave as one of the exhibits to my  
22 testimony the ordinance that they passed. They created a  
23 Lincoln Highway overlay district. The underlying zoning stayed  
24 the same, but the overlay district gave additional use  
25 opportunities and more flexibility with lot areas, setbacks,

1 also gave the Board of Commissioners the ability to change  
2 parking regulations. Parking is very expensive and sometimes  
3 developers can meet everything in the code, but they just can't  
4 provide sufficient parking. So this ordinance allows the board  
5 to modify the parking regulations if, for example, public  
6 transit's available, which it is in Caln Township. If they can  
7 have --- partner with their neighbor in terms of providing  
8 shared parking. And those are the types of incentives that the  
9 ordinance providers.

10           And I think it has. As Mr. --- Commissioner King  
11 --- Young, excuse me, referenced, there have been four  
12 successful properties that have been developed using both LERTA  
13 as well as the change in the zoning ordinance. They will be  
14 considering two tomorrow for a new recreational center along  
15 Lincoln Highway, for an indoor training facility for softball  
16 and baseball, which is going to be a great asset to the  
17 community. And that gentleman --- that property owner has a  
18 business owner in Caln for 20, 30 years and has really never  
19 had the incentive or the encouragement to redevelop a vacant  
20 piece of land. And these statutes definitely --- if you speak  
21 to him, his name is Mr. Rudy --- he will tell you that this  
22 incentivized him to do that.

23           And so again, I encourage municipalities. I don't  
24 think there's any legislation that has to be enacted. The  
25 zoning ordinances are already authorized through the

1 municipalities' planning code, but the local leaders need to  
2 understand that that zoning ordinance could be dusted off and  
3 modified to allow some flexibility and incentives. So I'm  
4 happy to answer any questions.

5 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Any questions. Representative  
6 Neilson?

7 REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
8 Thank you today for your testimony. I want to talk a little  
9 bit more about --- you said there were some hiccups and you  
10 said to implement a 90-day period because of the one person,  
11 and we don't want to mention his or her name. It shouldn't be  
12 just one person. But what would that 90-day do to ---?

13 MR. YOUNG: So a 90-day or 180 days would give a  
14 municipality, you know, a deadline. Under the LERTA Law right  
15 now there is no deadline and the taxing authority can either  
16 --- there's no requirement to even hear the proposal. So they  
17 could just receive it and say thank you very much and never ---  
18 never even hear the proposal from the municipality.

19 They did let us talk at several meetings. We had  
20 several private meetings to try to win over that board member.  
21 The Chester County Economic Development Council had several  
22 meetings with board members. But there is no requirement that  
23 the school district or the county even consider our proposal.  
24 So a --- you know, just like a land development application.  
25 You know, there are time frames. There are, you know --- there

1 are things that a municipality has to do once an application is  
2 received. I think under LERTA, it would be nice to have one  
3 even be heard because they didn't ---.

4 REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: So that's the team you'll  
5 be looking for, for us to make it mandated that if it's brought  
6 up by a municipality authority, that the county itself would at  
7 least consider the project within 90 days and respond in  
8 writing or something like that?

9 MR. YOUNG: Well, I would say that more it's usually  
10 the school districts that are more reluctant to take up the  
11 taxing. The school district ---.

12 REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: So LERTA mandates that? I  
13 don't want to cut you off here, I'm sorry, but LERTA mandates  
14 that the school district approves this as well? Is that what  
15 I'm hearing here?

16 MR. YOUNG: Correct. So each taxing authority has  
17 to pass an either ordinance or resolution, depending on the  
18 code. So the school district had to pass a resolution. The  
19 county and the township had to pass an ordinance approving  
20 those LERTA. Now, a municipality could do it on their own and  
21 just abate a municipality's taxes or just abate the  
22 municipality and the county. But being that a school district  
23 is 80 percent of that property tax, it doesn't make sense to  
24 just do two of the tax ---. But the problem is we --- for a  
25 year we just spun our wheels and, you know, there was nothing

1 we could do to force them to hold a vote. And we believed the  
2 entire time the majority of the School Board would vote for  
3 this, but they were trying to make it seem like they were  
4 letting this member vet this process, and they yielded the  
5 floor to him for almost a year.

6           REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: So you talk about your  
7 relationship and Representative Lewis being your Rep. And I'd  
8 be glad to co-sponsor something like that with Representative  
9 Lewis to move this forward. This way we can work together  
10 because, coming out of the City of Philadelphia we have a tax  
11 abatement plan. And as a former City Councilman, I was ready  
12 to expand it. Because what we heard in the news --- years ago  
13 we saw how the tree went broke, and now the tree is flourishing  
14 because of a plan like this and doing --- they probably went up  
15 to 20-year tax abatements with the percentage breakdown, as you  
16 do. The City of Philadelphia, we do a ten-year tax abatement.  
17 And everybody --- you're selling the property because it's  
18 jumping. And I introduced legislation just like you did here  
19 with the 90 percent --- 80 percent. It's a great tool to  
20 utilize it, and I wanted to make that clear, that everybody  
21 should utilize that percentage and bring them back on the tax  
22 rolls as fast as possible. But these are properties that are  
23 sitting dormant and not collecting nothing, and I think that's  
24 what your school district officials and all need to know.  
25 They're not getting nothing out of these. And pretty soon



1 we'll be taking them to court to try and collect the taxes.  
2 And then there's --- that corporation will be behind four other  
3 corporations, we can't even find them no more. But I would be  
4 grateful if Representative Lewis and I can work on something  
5 like that. And I thank you for your testimony. Thank you, Mr.  
6 Chairman. And Mr. Chairman, as you stated beforehand, some of  
7 us will be leaving. And I'd like to apologize to the future  
8 testifiers that I'm unable to stay. Representative Santora and  
9 I have to vacate here right now.

10 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Understand. Don't apologize.

11 REPRESENTATIVE NEILSON: In ten minutes, right.

12 CHAIRMAN PETRI: We are a little bit behind  
13 schedule. I personally won't care. I'm going to stay as long  
14 as it takes. I did want to, before we recognize Representative  
15 Lewis for a question, I wanted to acknowledge the presence of a  
16 gentleman who's been very helpful with the Urban Affairs  
17 Committee, John Kromer.

18 The other thing I'd like to note for the audience  
19 and for the members, don't forget House Bill 613,  
20 Representative Ward is over in the Senate. That would expand  
21 LERTA to a mixed-use development project, which will be  
22 extremely helpful. So representative, go ahead.

23 REPRESENTATIVE LEWIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And  
24 thank you, Representative Neilson for those comments. That was  
25 kind of where I was going with that, but I just have one

1 question. I don't mean to put anyone on the spot. Has the  
2 improvement with --- the Coatesville School District and that  
3 relationship between the township, has that improved any at all  
4 or with any of the other municipalities that you know of?

5 MR. YOUNG: So that's a loaded question. There's  
6 many different answers to that. As far as economic  
7 development-wise, I believe the Coatesville School District  
8 realizes now that things aren't just going to get better on  
9 their own. And just sitting there, like Representative Neilson  
10 said, just vacant buildings sitting there, they're not going to  
11 just automatically move on their own and that they have to take  
12 an active approach in making sure that they are a partner in  
13 revitalization, too, because like I said, 80 percent of their  
14 property tax value is the school district. And that's for 80  
15 percent of their buildings. So I think they've finally begun  
16 to realize that, you know, this --- that revitalization isn't  
17 just going to happen. And it's not just the municipalities'  
18 issue to deal with it. It's also that they can be a partner.

19 REPRESENTATIVE LEWIS: Thank you for that comment.  
20 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Sure. Representative Santora, I  
22 know you want one question before you have to roll.

23 REPRESENTATIVE SANTORA: Yeah. Thank you for your  
24 testimony today. Actually, I'm happy to report a good friend  
25 of mine and client and constituent of mine just got approved in

1 Caln this past week for one of his projects, so that's good  
2 news.

3 I think the LERTA program has a lot of good benefits  
4 to it. And I agree by putting a time frame on there when it  
5 can be approved, it sets it forth in motion. Is it 90 days?  
6 Is it six months? Whatever it is, that's got to be worked out.  
7 I think there is improvement. Do you have --- I think you said  
8 --- do you have a log of people ready to go if they can get  
9 this done or do you think this is something that you're going  
10 to go out and promote in order to bring more development?

11 MR. YOUNG: So through the Chester County Economic  
12 Development Council we have worked with property owners to try  
13 to bring different types of groups. I'll give you an example  
14 of where this program had a stalled project. So Del Toyota,  
15 which you may have passed yesterday, Sloane Toyota moved into  
16 their territory and they were not going to upgrade their  
17 facility. They had an approved plan and they were just going  
18 to kind of walk away from that. Once we passed --- once LERTA  
19 passed and we all adopted it, that essentially took 50 percent  
20 off of their taxes for the new development. The bank then  
21 said, okay, this is now a viable project because your tax  
22 abatement will also help with your loan payment. That project  
23 went forward. There was no investment. And between part time  
24 and full time, there are now 50 more employees working in that  
25 facility.

1           So there were --- there are new projects, you know,  
2 that people were waiting, like Ms. Camp said, that needed  
3 change to the zoning. Then we also put on top of it, you know,  
4 a sweetener to abate the taxes. And I think we have multiple  
5 different types of projects now on the books. We have some  
6 that were stalled and just not moving forward that now are  
7 moving --- they already had approved plans. But because of the  
8 economy and because of new banking regulations, whatever it  
9 was, they just couldn't move forward and now are.

10           And we're actually beginning to see talk, whispers  
11 and actually sometimes plans coming forward on new development,  
12 which will take some time to flush out through conditional use  
13 or a land development process. But the ones that were --- that  
14 are already done, they were plans that were just sitting there.  
15 They were approved and had been approved for years and just  
16 never ---.

17           REPRESENTATIVE SANTORA: So you're willing to do it  
18 on spec, not necessarily an identified tenant?

19           MR. YOUNG: Correct.

20           REPRESENTATIVE SANTORA: That's good.

21           MR. YOUNG: So we had --- so we had taken an  
22 approach before. Like Ms. Camp said, we were kind of rigid in  
23 the old plan. We weren't willing to deviate from the old  
24 zoning. The last two boards that I have served on, we have  
25 taken a completely different approach. Bring us something. We

1 are going to --- we'll evaluate it, you know, and whatever we  
2 need to do to make sure that you get this approved, as long as  
3 it's something that the community feels is of value, then we're  
4 going to lift mountains to make sure that these projects get  
5 approved.

6 REPRESENTATIVE SANTORA: Excellent. Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Knowles, do you  
8 still have a question?

9 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: I believe that my question  
10 may be better off not asking it. I'm going to wait on it.

11 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Okay. I get it. We're going to  
12 take a two-minute break, but I did want to make a comment to  
13 you. You are correct, Mr. Young. In my own community they  
14 passed a LERTA provision. There was an added benefit. The  
15 community had, among the business community, the perception of  
16 being unreasonable so that it came to be that in the business  
17 community nobody would make any change to their building, any  
18 improvement, because they were afraid the book was going to be  
19 thrown at them. And usually it was. I'm talking about a  
20 quarter of a million dollars to comply with fire and panic and  
21 ADA if you made some little change. That's not good for a  
22 community. So I compliment you on both the attitude change and  
23 then the passage of the statute, because when you pass that  
24 statute you're telling the business community we expect you to  
25 keep your buildings up to code and we want to make it available

1 for you. Let's just take a two-minute break, not longer, so  
2 that our court reporter can rest her fingers.

3 SHORT BREAK TAKEN

4 CHAIRMAN PETRI: The Parkesburg Borough, Jack  
5 Assetto, Parkesburg Business Association member, and James  
6 Thomas, the borough manager. I notice a little ding in the  
7 back, but if you want to come in and we can start.

8 MR. ASSETTO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing  
9 us to testify today on behalf of the Borough of Parkesburg.  
10 Parkesburg, as we know it today, is the first community  
11 comprised of about 3,500 residents. It's a settled community  
12 dating back to the 1700s. Our town is seeing the ups and downs  
13 of modern times. In the pre-Depression era, we had a thriving  
14 ironworks business that supplied boiler tubes to the railroad,  
15 monitored mines during the Depression. Most of the local  
16 residents left to seek work in other communities.

17 In more recent economic times, we've seen massive  
18 foreclosures in the borough with many houses falling into  
19 blighted conditions, with some becoming completely abandoned.  
20 Following the foreclosure process, many banks sold these homes  
21 off to companies and individuals mostly from out of the area to  
22 turn them into rental units. These rental units comprise over  
23 38 percent of individual borough residences, an extremely high  
24 number. That is more than one-third of the total number of  
25 residential dwellings in Parkesburg.

1           For the most part, these rental units are owned by  
2 absentee landlords who only care about the monthly rent check,  
3 who rarely see the properties, let alone keep them in a  
4 repaired state. On the other hand, we have local landlords who  
5 pride themselves on the condition of their property. Granted,  
6 there are some properties that are over 100 years old in our  
7 borough. Preservation of them is somewhat of a challenge.

8           Our business district has also come into disrepair.  
9 Several commercial properties are owned by out-of-state  
10 companies who choose not to rent them in order to obtain a tax  
11 write-off, leaving us with many vacant storefronts, as we  
12 witnessed yesterday on our tour. These properties are  
13 prominent when you first enter the borough. People visiting  
14 our town draw the opinion Parkesburg is not a desirable  
15 community to live in.

16           Infrastructure blight is another issues that faces  
17 our community. Our infrastructure, including state roads, are  
18 rapidly deteriorating to the point of collapse. Our main  
19 thoroughfare of State Route 372, which is crowned so badly that  
20 the center point of the road is almost a foot higher than the  
21 sidewalk curb line, which no longer exists because of the  
22 deterioration of the sidewalks. This causes numerous vehicle  
23 accidents involving parked cars in the business district.  
24 Because of this, the sidewalks have crumbled and are a true  
25 safety hazard. There would not be a day go by --- goes by in

1 front of my business that somebody doesn't trip. It would be a  
2 total waste of time and money to replace the sidewalks until  
3 the roads are regraded. PennDOT has been made aware of this on  
4 numerous occasions but to no avail.

5           The State has recently put into place a gas tax,  
6 which is supposed to address road issues. Currently, State  
7 Route 10, which runs through the borough, is being repaved  
8 while Route 372, which is not being repaved. Route 372 should  
9 also be repaired and repaved and widened as it handles a large  
10 volume of truck traffic going to the industries west of  
11 Parkesburg. Many visitors also travel this route to go to the  
12 new Victory Brewing Company in nearby West Sadsbury Township.  
13 This facility could be the Cadillac to resurrect --- catalyst  
14 to resurrect a good business client in Parkesburg.

15           Another issue is the replacement of the West Street  
16 Bridge --- West Bridge Street Bridge. This has been in limbo  
17 for close to 20 years and only recently has gone into a design  
18 stage. The loss of this bridge has cost the borough a grocery  
19 store and several smaller shops in the West End. The loss of  
20 this bridge also limits the accessibility of emergency vehicles  
21 into the western part of Parkesburg.

22           Towns the size of Parkesburg were once attractive to  
23 families as they provided the means to survive with a  
24 mercantile climate that provided food and clothing at  
25 affordable prices from local merchants. With the invasion of



1 the shopping malls and big-box stores, the local merchant has  
2 pretty much gone by the wayside, their stores now boarded up  
3 and left to deteriorate.

4           There is currently an effort in the Borough of  
5 Parkesburg to create revitalization in both our business and  
6 residential district. This effort is being led by the Borough  
7 Council along with a consultant and a committee comprised of  
8 business and professional leaders. We know that we have a  
9 challenging mission, but it is our desire to see it through to  
10 its implementation. Thank you.

11           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Mr. Thomas?

12           MR. THOMAS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman,  
13 Representatives. My name is James Thomas and I presently serve  
14 Parkesburg Borough as their borough manager. Parkesburg  
15 Borough is about 1.9 miles square with a population of 3,593  
16 persons. Our housing units consist of 883 owner-occupied homes  
17 with 575 rental units. At present, a total of 149 housing  
18 units are vacant. Now, this consists both of the single-family  
19 units as well as rental property --- rental units.

20           In 2007, with the downturn of the economy beginning  
21 and causing job losses and the ballooning of mortgage rates on  
22 the rise, foreclosures and sheriff's --- sheriff sales became  
23 frequent. Many individuals learning of foreclosures and  
24 sheriff sales just walked away from their properties before any  
25 actual court action could take place. Many who abandoned their

1 properties felt no longer responsible because of the bills  
2 and/or moneys owed did not want to be found. In most cases,  
3 the actual foreclosures of the properties could take two or  
4 three years to pass through our court systems before the  
5 mortgagee could take possession. Homes listed for sale through  
6 real estate agencies also needed to be maintained if the owner  
7 would not. Property maintenance of abandoned properties were  
8 being done by borough employees, with the costs entered against  
9 that property as a municipal lien, until the person responsible  
10 could be located.

11           In 2012, Borough Ordinance 505 was signed into law  
12 by the Borough. This ordinance required a mortgagee, prior to  
13 issuance of a Notice of Default by the mortgager, to inspect  
14 the property that is secured by the mortgage. Upon completion  
15 of the inspection, the mortgagee has ten days to register the  
16 property with the borough, whether or not it's occupied or  
17 vacant. If the property is found to be occupied but remains in  
18 default, the mortgagee shall inspect the property promptly  
19 monthly until the default is satisfied or the property is found  
20 to be vacant. Within ten days of finding the property vacant,  
21 the mortgagee must notify the borough and update the status of  
22 the property. The mortgagee then becomes responsible for the  
23 maintenance to the property as well as maintaining security to  
24 that property.

25           The downfall of the economy also required many

1 individuals to place their homes up for sale because of a  
2 variety of reasons. This opened the door for investors to  
3 purchase property at a low cost and convert owner-occupied  
4 homes into rental units. Parkesburg's rental properties, which  
5 increased dramatically in numbers, also became serious problems  
6 to many neighborhoods, with an increase in property maintenance  
7 issues, increased infestation of insects and vermin and an  
8 increase in crime. An outdated rental inspection mortgage  
9 program was replaced with a more restrictive property  
10 maintenance and rental space requirement, Ordinance #492, in  
11 2011. A five-year inspection program was replaced with a  
12 rental unit inspection requiring an inspection every two years  
13 or with the change of tenant.

14           Absentee owners living outside of a 25-mile radius  
15 of Parkesburg were required to have a property manager or agent  
16 who resides within that 25-mile radius and responsible for the  
17 property. Each rental unit is inspected separately and is  
18 issued a rental permit, or an occupancy permit, and valid for a  
19 two-year period or change of tenant. All common areas where  
20 the rental unit is located, both inside and out, must comply  
21 with the International Property Maintenance Code. Any failures  
22 to comply with the Property Maintenance Code within a specified  
23 time period could result in the withdrawal of rental permits  
24 and eviction of tenants.

25           A section was also added to our ordinance regarding

1 three police actions at the same rental unit within a year.  
2 This would result in the eviction of the occupants. One  
3 problem area discovered was when violations of the ordinance  
4 required loss of permits or eviction of tenants is the time it  
5 takes between the filing of documents in the court system to  
6 actually evict the tenant.

7           So in an effort to control blight and return  
8 business to our borough, the borough has rewritten the  
9 Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance in 2014, rewritten  
10 the Zoning Ordinance in 2015. We have hired a full-time  
11 property maintenance and rental inspector this year and we've  
12 done away with contract employees.

13           Currently the borough is in the process of  
14 formulating a new revitalization plan with the help of a  
15 professional planner. The borough is also in the final stages  
16 of replacement of a vehicle and pedestrian bridge over Amtrak.  
17 Now, this bridge carries pedestrians as well as vehicle traffic  
18 and the addition of high-level platforms and parking upgrades  
19 to our railroad station, of which we have point of ridership  
20 and there are nine stops a day in the Borough of Parkesburg  
21 going east and nine stops a day going west on the Keystone  
22 Line. We are presently --- they are presently installing  
23 turnarounds for SEPTA in the Atglen area and have been doing  
24 that --- that turnaround's already installed. So with that,  
25 ladies and gentlemen and all the Representatives, I submit that

1 as my report on the Borough of Parkesburg.

2 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Corbin?

3 REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 I'd like to thank both of you for the tour through Parkesburg  
5 yesterday. It's an area I drive through quite often. But when  
6 you see it from a vehicle and you see it when you're out  
7 walking on the sidewalk, it gives you a whole new perspective,  
8 especially the part you mentioned, Jack, about the level of the  
9 street being a foot higher than the sidewalks.

10 Your comment, Jack, about route 372, is there any  
11 plan for improvement of 372 either on the 12-year plan or has  
12 DVRPC or the County Planning Commission looked at it?

13 MR. ASSETTO: We've had PennDOT in town numerous  
14 times when the stream that runs under 372, which goes back to  
15 the 1920s, collapses, and they come in and they fill the hole  
16 up, and that's about the extent of it. The solution to the  
17 problem on 372 is the fact that there's a railroad track going  
18 over it. It's a trolley line that used to run from Coatesville  
19 to Atglen. And the rails are still there and they impede the  
20 road up and that has caused the crowning. And the only way to  
21 solve it is --- and it's primarily in the business district ---  
22 is to come in and tear the road up, pull the tracks out,  
23 regrade the road, put a new road in and then replace the  
24 sidewalks.

25 REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Who owns the rails?

1           MR. ASSETTO: Whoever owned the trolley company.  
2 They just abandoned --- the trolley line was abandoned and they  
3 were just left to stay.

4           REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Thank you.

5           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Christine Goldbeck has a question.

6           MS. GOLDBECK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Regarding  
7 the ordinances, which you know fascinate me, did you get  
8 pushback from bankers or landlords as you started to enact  
9 these or an entity put them in play?

10          MR. THOMAS: Not at all. Education was the --- was  
11 the main thing. Once the ordinance was explained, and I  
12 explained it to one bank in Lancaster and one bank --- another  
13 bank yesterday, two banks, that what was required of the  
14 ordinance, we did not get much pushback other than one bank  
15 said, well, we just may walk away from it, too. I said, well,  
16 before you do, please put me in touch with your --- with your  
17 legal department, and I will get you to sign that over to us  
18 before you walk away. Well, then things kind of changed and  
19 they were in compliance with what we needed at the time.

20          MS. GOLDBECK: And generally compliance is  
21 successful? You get a lot of compliance with it?

22          MR. THOMAS: We have so far been able to get almost  
23 a hundred-percent compliance from the lending institutions.  
24 And we stay in line with counsel, of course, to make sure that  
25 compliance has been --- but yes, we've had good success with

1 it.

2 MS. GOLDBECK: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 CHAIRMAN PETRI: I have a couple --- I have a couple  
4 questions for you on those. You mentioned the bridge project  
5 has been stalled for a long time and then you also mentioned,  
6 well, I saw yesterday the road. I get what you're talking  
7 about. It is a real problem. Let's start with the road. I  
8 assume the road issue is not a normal PennDOT maintenance. It  
9 requires some sort of design of a big project by itself.

10 MR. THOMAS: If I can speak to that issue?  
11 PennDOT's feeling on the road issue is anything below the  
12 surface of the road belongs to the municipality. This is true  
13 with stormwater inlets, with almost anything that's done.  
14 Route 10 is being repaved from Cochranville to Route 30, is in  
15 the process of milling now. In the inspection before the  
16 milling, I had to replace new stormwater inlets on Route 10  
17 prior to their going about. So yeah, PennDOT says we do the  
18 road and all the air above it. The rest of it's yours.

19 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Which, of course, places a  
20 tremendous burden of you, having to foot that cost. On the  
21 bridge project, is that on the county tip?

22 MR. THOMAS: It's number one on the county tip.

23 CHAIRMAN PETRI: It just took that long?

24 MR. THOMAS: It took that long. We're in the final  
25 stages now of final design. We just now signed another

1 extension on the contract with our engineers in Philadelphia,  
2 Parsons Brinckerhoff, so we are still working on that. Of  
3 course, it's a long, drawn-out process, unfortunately, and just  
4 takes a tremendous amount of time.

5 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Any other questions? Yep.  
6 Representative Knowles?

7 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
8 This is more a --- the more involved and the more I hear about  
9 the problems that we're dealing with, with blight, the more  
10 important I realize it is that somehow or another communities  
11 need to share information. I'm not sure that's --- that's  
12 happening in a lot of situations.

13 I'll give you an example. A little community in the  
14 district that I represent, so Joe Schmo, an absentee landlord,  
15 owns a home. The house burns down. So Joe decides that he's  
16 going to take the insurance dollars and he's going to go to  
17 Vegas and have a hell of a good time. Well, in the meantime,  
18 when he walks away from that house, he stops paying taxes. He  
19 simply walks away. The neighbors then have to deal with the  
20 burned-out property. The grass grows. Nobody shovels the  
21 snow. The bank doesn't want it. They don't want it because  
22 it's just not worth enough to them. And they try to do a  
23 judicial sale and nobody wants it even for a few hundred  
24 dollars. One of the communities that I represent is --- they  
25 passed an ordinance that allows the borough to hold insurance



1 money to ensure that that property is taken care of, to be sure  
2 that that property is demolished.

3           Now, some would say it's illegal. I don't know  
4 whether it is or it isn't. But guess what, they're doing it  
5 and it's working. They're doing it and it's working because  
6 they were just so frustrated. They were so frustrated with  
7 having to deal with absentee landlords. Where I live, they're  
8 everywhere. And this has really held people accountable in  
9 terms of their property. So just another --- you know, just  
10 another bit of information that I think is good to share. And  
11 I'll let you know if it catches up with them.

12           MR. THOMAS: Representative, there's a copy of that  
13 ordinance on my desk for my approval, and we're talking with  
14 our solicitor now about implementation of that ordinance. Yes,  
15 it is a workable tool.

16           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Knowles, would you  
17 like to share the name of the community that has that  
18 ordinance?

19           REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: That would be the Tamaqua  
20 Borough.

21           CHAIRMAN PETRI: There you go. Thank you. Seeing  
22 no other questions, I think we're going to hear from the  
23 Airport Board Authority.

24           MR. PLAUGHER: Borough Council would like me to  
25 express their thanks for your interest in our borough and

1 communities.

2 CHAIRMAN PETRI: It's a beautiful borough. We are?  
3 Who do we have next?

4 REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: We actually have Downingtown  
5 Borough.

6 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Okay. Mr. Plaughner, would you mind  
7 switching? The Airport Authority apparently has to rush out.  
8 My apologies. I know everybody --- you guys can wrestle later.  
9 There's a beautiful jet on the runway with a 4:30 flight going  
10 somewhere. I was tempted to jump onboard.

11 DR. KOENIG: After a two and a half-hour stress test  
12 this morning, I thank you for the opportunity to continue it.  
13 Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Committee. Thank you for  
14 allowing the Airport Authority to speak to you today on our  
15 expansion efforts. This is going to be somewhat informational  
16 but it's also connected to blight.

17 So somebody asked why the airport's expansion  
18 project is part of a hearing on blight. And what has already  
19 been mentioned, revitalization is a positive response to  
20 blight. When an airport is situated near manufacturing  
21 companies or corporate offices, it is a benefit to those  
22 companies. Oftentimes industries choose to relocate to open  
23 offices over manufacturing operations close to an airport, such  
24 as Chester County Airport, because they're able to easily get  
25 their products and their key personnel where they need to be.

1           Chester County Airport is situated in Valley  
2 Township, along Route 30, just west of Coatesville. The  
3 airport serves the greater Chester County businesses, such as  
4 QVC, Vanguard, and for that matter, 115 corporations in and  
5 around Chester County use that airport annually. And these are  
6 dedicated flights through NetJets and ExecJets to destinations  
7 around the U.S. There are currently 19 corporate hangars and  
8 60 individual tee hangars on the field. The public is welcomed  
9 at the terminal building, where Signature Aviation, the  
10 fixed-base operation and the Flying Machine Cafe reside.

11           Adjacent to the airport is Sikorsky's Coatesville  
12 facilities, which manufactures the \$20 million S-92 helicopter  
13 and a smaller version. Sikorsky actually requires access to  
14 the airport for their flight testing prior to sale and turnover  
15 of the aircraft. To accomplish that, you know, they do a  
16 through-the-fence operation. And I'll talk about that shortly.

17           The airport is overseen by the Authority, composed  
18 of a seven-member board appointed by the County Commissioners  
19 who serve a five-year term. The board is supported by an  
20 airport manager, Gary Hudson, a solicitor, by an accountant, by  
21 an airport engineer, Delta Consulting Engineers, and a  
22 secretary. And annually, the airport books are audited for  
23 incorporation into the county, into its county audit in the  
24 June time period.

25           Recently, the Authority, which I represent,

1 submitted two multi-modal proposals for transportation  
2 improvements, one to DCED and the other to PennDOT. These  
3 proposals, as we see it, are critical to the initiation of our  
4 long-range plan to make Chester County Airport a safer and more  
5 user-friendly environment for air travel. The proposed land  
6 development plans include a control tower, west-end corporate  
7 hangars, expansion of the terminal building and other  
8 improvements on the field.

9           The airport submitted an application to the FAA for  
10 a contract tower. The airport has 50,000 operations annually,  
11 consisting of a mix of jet service, helicopter flights and  
12 smaller propeller aircraft. There are more corporate flights  
13 into and out of this airport than Reading and Lancaster put  
14 together. This is a significant airport in Chester County.  
15 The sheer complexity of these operations, as well as the  
16 volume, mandate tower operations. Right now planes talk to one  
17 another using UNICOM, which is an antiquated system, 122.7. It  
18 requires you to be, let's say, within five miles of the airport  
19 so that you don't have interference with other airports that  
20 use the same frequency. So it's very important that this be  
21 updated and we approve our opportunities to enhance safety.

22           Now, the fact that Sikorsky's outside the airport  
23 fence means that they must truck over or hover taxi from their  
24 heliport to the airport, which impacts the local traffic and  
25 reduces efficiency. They have to shut down Washington Lane in

1 order to get this over and across. The control tower is the  
2 solution. As Sikorsky sees it, that is the solution to them.  
3 They can actually fly under control right into our airspace  
4 right from the heliport. At issue, however, is the FAA review  
5 process, which is changing the evaluation criteria and has  
6 placed a moratorium on decisions despite safety concerns. So  
7 we have written to our Senators and Representatives who can  
8 hopefully influence the FAA in getting that decision made in a  
9 more expeditious fashion.

10           The airport is currently out of space to house  
11 additional corporate jets, which limits growth and rental  
12 income to the Authority. For this reason, the Authority has  
13 targeted additional hangar construction at the west-end of the  
14 field. The plan is to develop the land for an additional 11  
15 large or 22 smaller corporate hangars. The need is based on  
16 monthly inquiries received by our airport manager from  
17 corporate representatives seeking space.

18           Finally, the terminal building expansion plan is  
19 based on a preliminary design by Bernardon & Associates. This  
20 incorporates an additional 6,000 square feet of FBO,  
21 fixed-based operation, and public space to better serve these  
22 needs. With that comes additional parking and better access to  
23 the terminal. We see this as Chester County. And this  
24 terminal building needs to be welcoming and professional in its  
25 appearance, consistent with the planned growth of this airport.

1 Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Any questions? Comments? Yes,  
3 Representative Corbin?

4 REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I  
5 think he's a little surprised. I came in here this morning  
6 saying I just --- I can't think of any questions to ask, and  
7 they just keep popping up. You mentioned Washington Lane with  
8 regards to Sikorsky. What happened to the plan, and correct me  
9 if I'm wrong, to build a roadway, almost a tunnel, under ---  
10 put Washington Lane under a tunnel so that there would be no  
11 interruption from Sikorsky over to the airport. Was that plan  
12 abandoned?

13 MR. KOENIG: For all practical reasons I'd say, yes,  
14 it has --- discussions were had at Chester County Economic  
15 Development Council with all parties, including Sadsbury, and  
16 Sadsbury's engineer, who suggested the tunnel. Sikorsky no  
17 longer sees this as an appropriate solution. That's the  
18 answer.

19 REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Knowles?

21 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
22 Just curious, how many runways?

23 MR. KOENIG: There's only one runway that goes  
24 basically east to west.

25 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: And what's the length of

1 the runway?

2 MR. KOENIG: 5,500 feet. I mean, eventually there  
3 are long range --- and when I say long range, over like, you  
4 know, I won't be around, to provide a 6,100-foot runway which  
5 would provide additional safety space for that jet service. So  
6 right now, jets are kind of limited to full fuel and part  
7 passengers or full passengers and lesser amounts of fuel in  
8 order to ensure the safety along takeoff.

9 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Minimum length for a jet to  
10 land is --- a non-commercial jet, but a jet is somewhere around  
11 5,000?

12 DR. KOENIG: Yes.

13 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: I just have never --- well,  
14 I'm glad to know that because I had a discussion with one of  
15 our airport guys about that. Economic development directors,  
16 people who work in that field, have told me when I was a County  
17 Commissioner that we needed a good go-around on the airport.  
18 And my question to him was where does an airport rank in terms  
19 of importance for a business to locate. And I had two  
20 different answers. The one guy said to me, well, you know,  
21 location, location, location in terms of access to interstate  
22 highways and byways. The second, availability of a good  
23 workforce. He said, you know, airport, in terms of --- maybe  
24 ranks in the top five. I just would like to hear your reaction  
25 to that statement.

1           MR. KOENIG: I can only make a comment that I see  
2 relative to Chester County Airport, so ---. I know for a fact  
3 that there has been studies by AOPA, Aircraft Owners and Pilots  
4 Association, regarding economic impact of an airport. And it  
5 basically comes to a three to one impact to the surrounding  
6 community. So whatever investment goes on in that airport,  
7 there's a threefold return to the surrounding community.  
8 That's a value.

9           The attraction, as I see it, of this airport is that  
10 right now we have 115 corporations that are using that field  
11 now. Eventually, people --- you know, we don't want this to be  
12 an old boys field. You know what I mean? We want this to be a  
13 professional field and a safe field. We want to give it a  
14 proper air that it should have. And by doing that, we will  
15 begin to attract more corporate impact within that area. Right  
16 now we have 19 corporations. Nineteen (19) corporations have  
17 jets on that field. And you'll find at some point that they'll  
18 want to move --- perhaps move some of their operations a little  
19 closer. We'll have to see.

20           REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Thank you, sir. Thank you,  
21 Mr. Chairman.

22           CHAIRMAN PETRI: Anybody else? Okay. You actually  
23 answered the question I was interested in and that was the  
24 economic impact of an airport. So thank you for that. And the  
25 sense I got from yesterday's tour was that the airport fit in



1 perfectly with the other two projects, because we're talking  
2 about transportation where in the end you're trying to move  
3 employees from one place to another where they can earn a good  
4 wage. And what I'm hearing out of this project is that the  
5 rail line provides opportunities for young --- young people to  
6 relocate small towns where they want to be and still get to  
7 workplaces. Obviously, an airport has that benefit.

8           The other side of it, of course, is I know for a  
9 fact that mechanics, aircraft mechanics, are hard to find and  
10 the starting salary is about \$60,000. So that's a --- that's a  
11 good-paying job.

12           Next panel, and I must have --- oh, I'm sorry,  
13 Harry.

14           REPRESENTATIVE LEWIS: That's okay, Mr. Chairman.  
15 Thank you. I just have one question. And would you voice  
16 briefly the significance of the Chester County Airport in  
17 comparison to the usage at the Philadelphia International  
18 Airport, how significant is this location?

19           MR. KOENIG: Well, clearly, these 115 corporations I  
20 mentioned are in or around the Chester County Airport. They're  
21 carrying to come to our airport to fly from there as opposed to  
22 going to Philadelphia, slogging through all the traffic,  
23 waiting in line for TSA. You know, when they arrive at our  
24 airport, that plane is ready to go. It's ready to go when  
25 they're at the airport. So the efficiency is one of the prime

1 benefits that these corporations see. So we also will attract  
2 planes that are housed presently in northeast Philadelphia. So  
3 we'll be stealing some of their hangars --- jets, rather, in  
4 coming to Chester County because of proximity again. It's  
5 better for the corporation. So this will be opportunities for  
6 us to grow.

7 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Fantastic. Thank you. Next we're  
8 going to hear from Steve Plaugher, President and CEO of Main  
9 Street Association. My apologies to you that we're running  
10 behind. I hope we're not creating any problems back home.

11 MR. PLAUGHER: We're fine. Thank you. I guess  
12 we're afternoon now. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Committee,  
13 Urban Affairs Committee. Thanks very much for entertaining us.  
14 We enjoyed your visit yesterday to Downingtown. Didn't know it  
15 was going to be a home game for the Chairman, so that's a win  
16 for us. So thank you for that and we appreciate that. So let  
17 me just give you my report here. So on behalf of the  
18 Downingtown Main Street Association, I want to thank the Urban  
19 Affairs Committee for visiting our borough and touring our most  
20 blighted property, the old Sonoco Paper Mill, on Route 322.  
21 Borough and state officials have been working hard and are  
22 close to bringing in new development, including a new train  
23 station.

24 Downingtown Main Street Association is an economic  
25 development arm of the Borough of Downingtown. We are a

1 501c(3) corporation comprised of citizens, property owners and  
2 businesses who share a common interest in the Borough of  
3 Downingtown's growth and economic development.

4           Established in 1993, Downingtown Main Street  
5 Association's mission is to take a lead role in the  
6 revitalization efforts in the Main Street District in order to  
7 develop and enhance economic opportunities in the borough. Our  
8 organization spearheads streetscape beautification projects,  
9 building rehabs and community-based events in order to increase  
10 property values, decrease commercial vacancy rates, and to  
11 bring vitality and vigor to the borough while preserving  
12 history that make Downingtown a special place to work and live.

13           Downingtown Main Street Association is a member of  
14 the Pennsylvania Downtown Center and National Main Street  
15 Center. We follow National Main Street's guiding framework  
16 four-point approach with established committees consisting of  
17 Organization, Promotion, Design and Economic Vitality.

18           Downingtown Main Street is governed by an elected  
19 Board of Directors who hire a President/CEO to manage daily  
20 operations. We are funded by a public/partner privateship ---  
21 partnership, with a contribution from the Borough of  
22 Downingtown and donations from the business community.

23           The borough is fortunate not to be overwhelmed by  
24 urban blight. However, there are properties in our business  
25 district that have been neglected for years. Our organization,

1 along with borough officials and code enforcement, partner to  
2 address these conditions. Owners are notified of property  
3 maintenance violations, given a time period to comply. And for  
4 those who don't comply, fines are issued.

5           Our organization has been successful with a straight  
6 --- with a state grant used for facade improvement at the  
7 center of town. Paint and other supplies were provided and our  
8 Board of Directors did the volunteer labor. The property owner  
9 then became motivated and paid to put on a new roof. Following  
10 this project, a nearby business painted the front of their  
11 building. A new Facade Improvement Program for 2016 should  
12 keep this ball rolling.

13           We have a \$108,000 Greenways, Trails and Recreation  
14 Program (GTRP) state grant pending approval at the GFA's next  
15 meeting, whenever that may come, we've been waiting, and this  
16 is for the Armor Alley Pocket Plaza located in our business  
17 district. If approved, the funds will be used to restore the  
18 plaza with new pavers, benches, plantings, general lighting,  
19 painting, an overhead canopy of lighting and a mid-block  
20 pedestrian crosswalk along with signage. The restored plaza  
21 will be a great asset to bring shoppers to our downtown and  
22 provide a site for community events and outdoor concerts. We  
23 are grateful to our state leaders, both Representative Lewis  
24 and Senator Andy D., for their tireless efforts in support of  
25 this project.

1           Downingtown Main Street Association recently  
2 completed a 16-month parking management project, which brought  
3 new state-of-the-art Kiosk Pay-Station to municipal parking  
4 lots in the borough and a \$115,000 investment in parking  
5 improvements.

6           One of our most rewarding accomplishments was to  
7 lead recovery and relocation efforts to 11 businesses displaced  
8 by a devastating fire last May. Downingtown Main Street  
9 Association coordinated a town meeting with impacted businesses  
10 and brought in resources, lenders, realtors, state, county and  
11 local officials, to assist with getting these businesses back  
12 open and remaining in the borough. Downingtown Main Street  
13 Association received local and regional recognition for our  
14 recovery efforts and have provided training to other  
15 municipalities.

16           And signature Downingtown Main Street events that  
17 bring thousands of people to Downingtown area, We Love  
18 Downingtown Valentine's Day Hearts Campaign, where we go into  
19 the business district and we sell hearts. They, you know, put  
20 their name and we put them on one of our central businesses  
21 that has a large storefront showroom. And that's a fundraiser,  
22 also instills pride in our community. We have the Downingtown  
23 Fine Arts Festival, which is coming up later this month,  
24 Downingtown Summer Jam, which is the last Friday in June, July  
25 and August. We have food vendors, bands, craft vendors. It

1 brings a ton of people out. And then in the fall we have a  
2 Zombie Run and Halloween Parade. Again, they're all --- all  
3 these are kind of a part of the tool to bring economic  
4 development --- bring people into our community.

5           And in conclusion I would like to thank the  
6 Pennsylvania House of Representatives Urban Affairs Committee  
7 for visiting our community and inviting Downingtown Main Street  
8 Association to speak on urban blight in our downtown. We are  
9 proud to share our challenges and success stories. I'll be  
10 happy to answer questions that you have.

11           CHAIRMAN PETRI: I'm interested in your comments of  
12 how you rank the importance of the new train station, its  
13 location and dealing with, you know, the issue. And maybe you  
14 can just talk a little bit about the stumbling blocks you think  
15 that exist to get it done.

16           MR. PLAUGHER: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. The  
17 train station moved just, you know, a few hundred feet down the  
18 tracks within the area of 322 and Boot Road, where the  
19 community visited yesterday. For those of you who were not  
20 there, it's in the Borough. Representative Corbin is well  
21 aware of it, having represented the Borough for many years.  
22 It's an ongoing project, probably about four or five years in  
23 the works. Our goal is to move the train station to this new  
24 area and also to bring in development.

25           The original developer was not able to follow

1 through. They ran into financial difficulties. We also had  
2 the 2008 Recession. The property now is in bank foreclosure  
3 with several different property --- property owners, paper  
4 mills. Sonoco Paper Mill is the former owner. They have some  
5 of the parcels and the bank now controls some of the others.  
6 We have a new developer that wants to come in and wants to buy  
7 the property, has actually begun the process, and we're allowed  
8 to put in a mixed-use development along with parking for the  
9 train commuters.

10 Our organization and borough officials were up in  
11 Harrisburg three weeks ago and we met with the state  
12 transportation secretary and her high-level staff, along with  
13 the developers, to show that we would like to develop this in  
14 an economic development fashion to bring in high --- high value  
15 apartments along with mixed-use and train parking. That's our  
16 preference. That would enhance our downtown. We find that the  
17 number of people who are young professionals, if they can have,  
18 you know, a residence near the train station, they can walk to  
19 the train, they come home, they can walk to our downtown, they  
20 can dine in our restaurants, dine in our shops. So the  
21 importance of a mixed-use development is --- it's critical to  
22 part of our main street mission to develop our downtown as  
23 opposed to the PennDOT perhaps wanting to build a sea of  
24 asphalt and just put in a parking. That's not something we  
25 want to see. We made it clear to PennDOT, and we believe that

1 the Governor is in favor of economic development, too. So  
2 mixed-use development with parking provided, thinking out of  
3 the box, as we mentioned earlier, we feel will be a benefit for  
4 us as well as PennDOT, for the train station development.

5 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Representative Knowles?

6 REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I  
7 commend you for what you are doing because I think we all  
8 realize the downtowns of small communities in terms of how they  
9 struggle. It seems to me that a downtown that is going to  
10 survive or that is going to prosper has to have a niche. It  
11 has to have a niche. By that I mean --- it's not located in my  
12 district, but the Borough of Jim Thorpe in Carbon County. And  
13 that was at one time was a dying community. Because of the  
14 architecture, because of some of the historic buildings,  
15 because of their closeness to the Lehigh River that runs right  
16 through their community, because of the rail excursions, it has  
17 become a very popular tourist promotion place in Carbon County.  
18 I guess I'd like you to talk a little bit about --- more about  
19 your niche. What is your niche? What separates you from the  
20 other communities? I know you talked a little bit about it,  
21 but if you could just expound a little bit.

22 MR. PLAUGHER: Yes. Thank you. What we found over  
23 the years of doing this, surveys, modern technology with Survey  
24 Monkey, those type of things, where we survey our general  
25 population, what do they want to see, why would they come to



1 our downtown, why would they come to events, and it seems to  
2 me, you know, shopping and dining are key events. Food, beer  
3 is important. So with that in mind, our borough council has  
4 been very proactive, very pro business over the years. We have  
5 an excellent borough manager as well. So they have gone out of  
6 their way to bring in new business, to be creative.

7           We have a Keystone Opportunity Zone. We have  
8 different programs for tax incentive. So we have done it, but  
9 I think our niche is that people want to come to dine, they  
10 want to come to shop, and we were able to open a couple of new  
11 restaurants. One opened and closed. We have a new owner. So  
12 I think that's coming back. But our feelings and experiences  
13 that people are kind of tired of the mall thing and, you know,  
14 they want to come downtown. They want to go and walk around, a  
15 couple different shops. We have an excellent park system. We  
16 have a safe community with a quality --- quality police  
17 department. So it seems like the niche that we --- we have  
18 found, what we're hearing, is that they want to come out, they  
19 want to be able to dine. And if there's multiple places,  
20 that's a good thing because then they visit one one night and  
21 one the other. So the competition will not necessarily drive a  
22 similar business out but would bring in new business.

23           REPRESENTATIVE KNOWLES: Thank you, Mr. --- thank  
24 you, Mr. Chairman.

25           CHAIRMAN PETRI: And just to share with you,

1 Representative, I have the benefit of 36 years of experience in  
2 that when we moved here in 1975, and for the people in the  
3 audience will say it might be hard to believe, you had to go to  
4 Paoli in order to get a train to go into Philadelphia. That  
5 was where the train stopped. And it took a couple years before  
6 it came to Downingtown and then into Thorndale. And that was a  
7 big thing for commuters. So one of the other attractions, of  
8 course, is if you're --- if you don't want to take the  
9 Schuylkill, which nobody really wants to, or you don't want to  
10 take 95 to get into town, the train is the way. So I can see  
11 this as being very attractive for young people to move back  
12 into the borough, raise their families, great school system,  
13 fantastic school system, and be able to commute for their job  
14 into Philadelphia relatively easy.

15           The other thing we see, and we know it because of  
16 Uber, young people don't want to --- don't want to drive at  
17 night. They're getting smarter about the DUI laws. They want  
18 to go out and have a --- have a social event, they take Uber's  
19 and leave the car behind. Representative Corbin, I think you  
20 had a question.

21           REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: I do. Thank you, Steve. I  
22 heard yesterday something about parking spaces for the train  
23 station being numbered at a thousand parking spaces. And is  
24 that something that PennDOT's requiring? Is it something that  
25 could be built --- does it have to be built all at once so you

1 have a thousand spaces, or could it be something where you  
2 build maybe 500 and then add to it as necessary or as needed?  
3 And a follow-up to that is the Chairman had mentioned about  
4 adding stops for SEPTA with Downingtown to Thorndale. Would  
5 there be any additional Keystone Line stops that would be done  
6 with the new train station? There are times I want to go to  
7 Harrisburg a little bit earlier than what Downingtown has to  
8 offer and there's no train available unless you go to Exton.  
9 And you can't park your car at Exton because all the spaces are  
10 filled up. So a lot of questions. Thank you.

11 MR. PLAUGHER: Thank you. I'll address them. So  
12 the first question as far as how --- how many --- how many  
13 parking spaces would --- would they need --- would PennDOT want  
14 to have with the train station. And that's where we're kind of  
15 at now with the developer. The developer is the Hankin Group.  
16 So the Hankin Group has --- has provided a plan, which would  
17 --- which would provide close to 400 parking spaces on the east  
18 side, near the tracks. And then with the reserve parking or  
19 expansion parking available on the west side, further down in  
20 the east Caln part of the development.

21 So as far as the number that's required, so it's  
22 kind of up in the air now. It depends. I mean, the borough  
23 had talked about --- what about a parking garage going up that  
24 would provide close-by parking without having a sea of asphalt.  
25 But you know, of course, that is a huge expense for a parking

1 garage. So we say, well, what about if we, you know, just did  
2 a smaller surface and had the ability to perhaps address a  
3 parking garage at the end of the road. So those are things  
4 that are all on the table and that was a presentation to  
5 PennDOT that would they --- you know, the Hankin Group would  
6 like them to consider their --- their plan to allow the parking  
7 as they laid out. So I believe that is something that's open  
8 to talks and that's the way we left it, the borough and Hankin  
9 Group and PennDOT. They were going to talk. The Hankin Group  
10 was going to submit further plans for the --- for the  
11 development, to see if it is feasible and it could be a  
12 win/win. I think PennDOT's original plans were just to put,  
13 you know, a parking lot up against the tracks, where we showed  
14 you yesterday. And this goes to the needs for economic  
15 development, to have a mixed-use plan there and still have  
16 plenty of parking for the community.

17           And the other question, as far as the additional  
18 stops, I'm not aware that we've had any type of discussions  
19 about that. Perhaps maybe when final plans are made, then  
20 maybe, you know, SEPTA will be able to judge based on the  
21 demand and the availability of parking that it could be that.  
22 We're thinking that this new location would be a better draw of  
23 commuters from West Chester, West Bradford, that whole area,  
24 because now if you're going you have to come up 322, through  
25 the tunnel. Traffic backs up along Business Route 30. With

1 this new train station, you're coming up Route 322, you're  
2 barely touching the entrance to the borough, and so it's going  
3 to be much easier in and out. So we think the ridership will  
4 increase as well. So for the general Downingtown area and  
5 beyond, it's going to really be a great area.

6 REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Our next panel will be Unruh,  
8 Turner, Burke & Frees, Kimberly Venzie, Attorney at Law. Go  
9 ahead. We're anxious to hear from you.

10 ATTORNEY VENZIE: Thank you very much. As the  
11 Chairman stated, my name is Kim Venzie. I'm with the law firm  
12 of Unruh, Turner, Burke & Frees. We're based out of West  
13 Chester.

14 Just to give you a little background about me, I've  
15 been in Chester County for four decades. So this is definitely  
16 my hometown. And I live in West Bradford. West Bradford  
17 Township is located essentially between Downingtown Borough and  
18 the City of Coatesville. My kids will eventually go to  
19 Downingtown West, which we're excited about. And I used to  
20 walk across the cornfields to get to the Exton Mall, back when  
21 I lived in Exton.

22 So our firm essentially does --- a department in our  
23 firm does all municipal work, so we represent many  
24 municipalities across Chester County. Currently I am Solicitor  
25 to West Caln Township, which is right nearby, and also a

1 Solicitor to Honey Brook Borough and also to Avondale Borough.  
2 But we also represent various other townships and boroughs  
3 across Chester County.

4           So I was asked to speak a little bit about the  
5 Borough of Phoenixville, which has really benefited from the  
6 Blight Act. My role as the municipal solicitor is really --- I  
7 see my role as the ground forces. So we had these great acts  
8 and statutes that we're hoping will help our townships and our  
9 boroughs. And then what I do is I try to actually take those  
10 acts and empower my zoning officer or my borough manager or my  
11 township manager to actually make that work for his township or  
12 his borough.

13           In the Borough of Phoenixville, especially, we ---  
14 there was a couple comments or --- that were made today that I  
15 kind of caught onto a little bit. There were things like  
16 what's your niche. If a borough has a niche, that's helpful,  
17 or thinking outside the box. And those are two things the  
18 Borough of Phoenixville did really well. Our firm was  
19 solicitor to the Borough of Phoenixville for about a period of  
20 ten years. We no longer are. There were some political  
21 shifts. But while we were there, we were --- we were really  
22 successful.

23           We had a zoning ordinance in the Borough of  
24 Phoenixville that really was this big (indicating), a huge  
25 document. You had to open it up and developers would come in

1 and they wouldn't even know where to start with --- with those  
2 many provisions in that borough. So we worked with a land  
3 planner and myself, we took a borough ordinance that was this  
4 big (indicating) and currently it's about this big  
5 (indicating), so --- and I've been told in the State of  
6 Pennsylvania there's not a zoning ordinance like it for any  
7 borough or any township, because it's that thin, but it's also  
8 very effective.

9           Now that I'm not Solicitor for the Borough of  
10 Phoenixville, I'll have a developer come to me and say I'm  
11 looking at the zoning ordinance and it seems like I can do  
12 pretty much anything I want with this piece. And I say, well,  
13 that's fairly accurate, but there are certain controls. But  
14 the Borough of Phoenixville really wanted to give the developer  
15 the ability to think outside the box. So that's been ---  
16 that's been very helpful in the Borough of Phoenixville. If  
17 you've been up there, you've seen how it's change and adapted.  
18 But one of the things that they've utilized very well in the  
19 Borough of Phoenixville is the Blight Act. The Blight Act has  
20 been a huge help in the Borough of Phoenixville. And what we  
21 did with that, we knew the Blight Act, so we did --- we knew it  
22 was this great empowerment tool coming down from on high. But  
23 what happened if we took that act and we actually put it into  
24 the ordinance. A lot of times I think what happens is there's  
25 these acts or these statutes that are out there and

1 municipalities don't even know that they can use those. So we  
2 took that ordinance and --- that act and we put it into actual  
3 code book so that the zoning officers and the borough manager  
4 knew that's a tool they could use in the borough.

5           And the borough, it was --- it was --- I guess one  
6 of the --- I'll explain to you a couple of reasons it was  
7 really help in the borough and why it's helpful in the  
8 townships and then why it's helpful and how it could be more  
9 helpful to us.

10           In the Borough of Phoenixville it was helpful. We  
11 had large --- some large projects come in. So we have a large  
12 --- a developer comes in with a lot of money doing a huge  
13 product in the borough. What happened is, that developer would  
14 get behind on water or sewer or permit fees. And you know, we  
15 wanted to encourage that development but we would be able to  
16 say to him, look, you're really behind on these fees. You've  
17 got to get --- we've got this Blight Act and we can enforce  
18 this. So although this building is not a blighted building,  
19 it's actually a great building, he would say, all right, I  
20 really need to get up to speed, so he would pay those fees.  
21 And when you let a developer get that behind on those  
22 permitting fees and water and sewer fees, it starts to affect  
23 your budget in the borough. So we use --- we used the Blight  
24 Act to help us with those larger developers. Small projects,  
25 you know, we have a couple of developers in the borough that



1 has a small --- a small house and maybe he's let that house go  
2 to shambles or it's a lot of apartments in the house, and then  
3 he would come to us and ask for a permit for another property.  
4 Well, of course the Blight Act was very useful in that way  
5 because we could say, well, we can't give you a permit for that  
6 property because you've got another property you got to fix up  
7 first. So that's a very easy way to use that tool.

8           What also happened is we've had a developer or a  
9 real estate owner that would have maybe ten pieces of property  
10 in the borough and he would want to sell one of the pieces.  
11 Well, we'd have liens in place on all his properties, so then  
12 he would try to sell this one piece. And the property owner  
13 who's going to buy the piece from him would say, you've got all  
14 these liens, what am I going to do. Well, we would actually be  
15 able to negotiate and settle up with those liens on that  
16 property to get that property in the hands of a property owner  
17 who's actually going to do something with that property. So  
18 you know, we could have taken a hard line and say, no, you got  
19 to clean up all your liens on all your properties before we  
20 start letting you transfer properties, but the borough is smart  
21 enough and will negotiate and say we're going to work with that  
22 develop --- that property owner to get that property in the  
23 hands of somebody who's actually going to do some good with  
24 that property. So the Blight Act's been very useful in that  
25 way. And I just think in general the Blight Act is just a good

1 negotiating tool to be able to tell a developer that we have  
2 this Blight Act, you can't get these permits until you settle  
3 up with the borough or the township. So that it's been helpful  
4 in that way.

5           It's also --- we represent boroughs but we also  
6 represent some townships, and the Blight Act, it doesn't just  
7 help boroughs or cities, it also helps townships. You know, we  
8 have lots of properties and townships where property owners  
9 aren't paying their sewer or water fees. There's some  
10 townships in Chester County that when you drive through them  
11 look very wealthy and look --- have spectacular homes. You  
12 would be surprised the number of people who are not paying  
13 their sewer, water and taxes in Chester County. Well, that  
14 impacts --- that impacts the municipality. It impacts their  
15 budget. So what we do is file liens against those properties.

16           And one of the challenges the Blight Act has not  
17 helped us with is when we file the liens, we know eventually if  
18 that property sells to a new property owner, they'll have to  
19 settle those liens. But a lot of times those liens will sit on  
20 a property for ten years. And unless a municipality wants to  
21 move forward with some kind of sheriff's sale, that type of  
22 action, they really can't do much with those --- with that  
23 money or how to collect it. One of the frustrating parts of  
24 that has been if a bank forecloses upon a property. We'll have  
25 liens in place against the property. The bank forecloses, but

1 not all banks will settle up with the municipality. You have  
2 to be very persistent. So I've had --- I have had luck with  
3 certain banks. When I find out they've got a property, I'll  
4 hunt down and you have to be very persistent. And you finally  
5 get through to the right person at the bank, and they'll say,  
6 fine, we'll settle up with the township or the borough and pay  
7 off those liens so the property is clear of those liens. But  
8 that's one of the frustrating things about the Act, you can get  
9 those liens in place, but then they sit there until the  
10 property changes hands.

11           The Blight Act does have a provision in it that  
12 talks about you can attach to the property owners, the assets  
13 --- the assets they have. But I haven't seen anyone really  
14 using that in Chester County as far as us municipal lawyers  
15 that I'm aware of. So it seems like it's going to be a useful  
16 tool, but according to the Act, you actually have to get a  
17 judgment in the Court of Common Pleas before you can actually  
18 attach the assets. And that's a process, and it's a costly  
19 process. So I think the Blight Act has mostly been useful as  
20 far as denying permits or getting liens in place, but I haven't  
21 seen it used as far as attaching the assets.

22           One of the helpful things in the Blight act, if  
23 there would be some way that we can have the banks actually  
24 settle up on those liens as part of that Act would really be  
25 helpful because there are a lot of foreclosures and a lot of

1 banks just sit on those liens until they transfer it to a new  
2 --- a new property owner. So I think that's --- I had actually  
3 a whole written information that I provided to you, but I  
4 figured after I heard everybody testify, I would testify about  
5 what would be of interest.

6 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Any questions from members? I know  
7 staff has a question. Go ahead, Representative Corbin.

8 REPRESENTATIVE CORBIN: Thank you, Kim. As you  
9 know, Phoenixville is part of my district. And I'm curious,  
10 was Franklin Commons one of the developments that was related  
11 to the Blight Act or anything in that on the North Side? It's  
12 been a tremendous success story. And just, you know, to follow  
13 up on what you said about Phoenixville, I mean, the borough is  
14 just a model for what can happen to an old steel town when it's  
15 rundown and what can happen when people pay attention to it and  
16 live there. It's really a wonderful place.

17 ATTORNEY VENZIE: I don't think it was part --- the  
18 Blight Act was part of that, but certainly the zoning ordinance  
19 was much more welcoming to Franklin Commons, which is a  
20 multi-use tenant building that the new zoning ordinance  
21 encouraged that kind of development in that area. So thank  
22 you.

23 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Christine?

24 MS. GOLDBECK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank  
25 you very much. As one of the staffers on the Bicameral,

1 Bipartisan Blight Task Force, I was one of the authors of  
2 Senate Bill 100, which became the Blight Act.

3 ATTORNEY VENZIE: Thank you.

4 MS. GOLDBECK: And I can tell you --- no, thank you.  
5 I can tell you that it was much more stringent. But through  
6 negotiations with stakeholders, you have what you have at this  
7 point.

8 We have talked about going back in and doing some  
9 changes as a result of people like you who come out and tell us  
10 this is what we really need. This is what we'd like to see.  
11 Naturally, we can't promise you that the votes are going to do  
12 it through the stakeholders, but if you would please suggest  
13 some language to me since you seem to have expert writing  
14 ability with zoning codes as well, which I'll be picking your  
15 brain about. I would be thrilled. And I will send you an  
16 e-mail so we can initiate contact. And I will take it before  
17 the members of the Bicameral and Bipartisan Blight Task Force.

18 ATTORNEY VENZIE: Great. Thank you very much.

19 MS. GOLDBECK: So anything, any suggestive language  
20 about changes for us to consider, I would be thrilled. And  
21 thank you for talking about it and its use. We're always  
22 curious to see these statutes that we put in place and for  
23 people locally to talk about them, because we can --- you know,  
24 these ladies and gentlemen can make all the laws in the world  
25 at the state level, but if they're not being used by all of you

1 at the local level, it's kind of fruitless. Thanks for using  
2 it.

3 ATTORNEY VENZIE: Thank you.

4 CHAIRMAN PETRI: I wanted to recognize  
5 Representative Lewis for closing comments.

6 REPRESENTATIVE LEWIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And  
7 I'd like to thank you, too, Kimberly. And ladies and  
8 gentlemen, this is a move that has been official to our  
9 communities. We hope to continue the dialogue. We hope to  
10 maintain a contact with all of you and all the stakeholders  
11 involved so we can do our part to continue this process. This  
12 is a part of the total process, and your connection with us is  
13 most important.

14 I've heard the word tools earlier. We're trying to  
15 get all of these tools together. And my analogy, just  
16 comparing it to a brand new auto mechanic, and he's put in this  
17 garage with all these tools that does everything to make the  
18 automobile synchronize smoothly. This is what we're trying to  
19 do, learning what all the tools are so we can move forward and  
20 have our communities operate smoothly. Mr. Chairman, I thank  
21 you very much.

22 CHAIRMAN PETRI: Thank you. I'm going to make a  
23 couple brief comments. My perception is that generally  
24 Commonwealth is probably the most difficult form of government.  
25 We rely on local control, not a county-based government.

1 There's really no other model left in the United States that  
2 operates like this. But it still is the best. It's what  
3 people like the most. They want to be able to go see their  
4 city council member and talk to her right across the table and  
5 say, hey, this is what's going on in my neighborhood. How can  
6 you help? The farther you are up in the chain, the harder it  
7 is to reach. You know, it's harder to reach your Congressman.  
8 It's harder to reach your State Representative --- or State  
9 Senator --- or U.S. Senators.

10           At the state level, we're still very local and  
11 approachable. Some people think we have too many State  
12 Representatives, but other people think that's okay because  
13 they can find their local State Representative. I know now  
14 exactly where your office is, Representative Lewis. So in  
15 order to be successful then we have to be communicating and we  
16 have to be educating. Today we learned that there are a lot of  
17 tools and there are a lot of skill sets that can be used. And  
18 this we learned from other municipalities. We learned that  
19 there's certain state statutes that have been recently enacted  
20 and can be tried in communities. But most importantly we heard  
21 from you and we understand that you have a vision. And the  
22 vision between the community seems to me to be pretty common.  
23 It's this idea of let's have a transportation of where you can  
24 get from one place to the other and hopefully bring people back  
25 into the boroughs and the communities. I think you'll be

1 successful. And I thought --- I forget who said it, it was one  
2 of the testifiers, but basically the example they gave was  
3 don't take no for an example. That's right, it was the  
4 township --- the township representative, the supervisor. He  
5 said I wasn't willing to take no. He didn't put it in those  
6 words, but I wasn't going to have the School Board stop this  
7 program and just kept being persistent. And that's what we're  
8 going to do.

9           The last thing I would share with the local elected  
10 officials in the audience, we have started a relationship. We  
11 have fantastic staff. Call upon us. Use us to provide  
12 resources and education back to you about how you may be able  
13 to deal with things. And let's be united in our approach. In  
14 Bucks County, what we hope to do as State Representatives is  
15 get together with our Senators and work together. I'm sure  
16 that's happening in Chester County, but we can always do better  
17 in every community. And so let's --- let's meet together.  
18 Let's talk together on our common issues and --- because  
19 collectively we're very, very strong. Individually, not so  
20 much. So thank you. I'm going to adjourn the hearing, and  
21 thank you for your testimony today. This meeting is adjourned.

22                   \* \* \* \* \*

23                   MEETING ADJOURNED AT 1:06 P.M.


24                   \* \* \* \* \*

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## CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify, as the stenographic reporter, that the foregoing proceedings were taken stenographically by me, and thereafter reduced to typewriting by me or under my direction; and that this transcript is a true and accurate record to the best of my ability.



Beth Strauss,