PENN CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT PLAN
Greater Reading; Berks County, PA

Berks County Economic Partnership
Sasaki Architects PC
The Brookings Institution
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Spanning the Schuylkill River, the Penn Corridor joins the City of Reading on the east bank and the Boroughs of West Reading and Wyomissing on the west bank. The center of the region is found along this two-mile corridor, with shopping, businesses, government, and culture. A series of mixed-use districts along the corridor, each with their own character, reflect different periods of development and offer a variety of experiences. The corridor serves a wide variety of populations, drawing people from the region via automobile and public transit, and lies within easy walking distance of the many neighborhoods that surround it on all sides.

In the future, the corridor will be able to expand its role as a stand alone destination as catalyst projects, infill development, and streetscape improvements increase the variety of activities within a comfortable attractive setting. Improvements to transit will make it easier to move along the corridor, encouraging people to stay longer and return more often. Residents, workers, and visitors will find many more shops.
Penn Corridor revitalizes downtown Reading and creates a regional destination, whether strolling through distinct sections or taking transit. New housing will provide more choices for people who prefer urban living and who in turn represent a committed constituency that establishes a more secure 18-hour environment.

In Greater Reading, the three municipalities have committed to working together to make the city center a better place for all, understanding that the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts. The City of Reading features two popular regional destinations: the Sovereign Center Arena and the Sovereign Center Performing Arts Center. A complementary restaurant district in a walkable environment has been lacking over the years. Two miles away, Wyomissing is home to regional retail and restaurant destinations: The VF Outlet Village and Viva Restaurant. With the growth of outlet centers nationally, this type of retail needs additional draws to remain competitive. In between, West Reading offers small shops in an attractive “main street” setting, but several gaps in the fabric suggest opportunities to reinforce this character.

The connection between these places is hampered by the West Shore Bypass (Route 422/222) that interrupts the Penn Corridor just where it crosses the Schuykill River. The interchange with the regional highway system provides excellent access for downtown; however, the highway scale and the emphasis on vehicular traffic make it difficult for pedestrians or bicycles to cross this area. The highway ramps and overpass, in combination with the Penn Bridge over the Schuykill River, make this half-mile journey almost impossible for a pedestrian.
On both sides of the river are a number of emerging districts and destinations that enrich the diversity of activities along the corridor. On the east bank of the river, the Reading Area Community College (RACC) is a growing presence that suggests opportunities for connection in a key spot along the Penn Corridor. The nearby GoggleWorks is another catalyst in this immediate area, creating a new center for performing and studio arts. On the west bank, an older warehouse district that is home to Palmer Chocolates has a distinct building stock that suggests potential for the future.

With a goal of working jointly to reconnect and improve the entire corridor, the leaders in Greater Reading have established an economic development strategy and a vision that will sustain the region in the near and long term. This strategy focuses on reinvestment in the center city, the symbolic and economic focus of the region.

The Berks Economic Partnership, which is a public/private partnership, has become the successor organization to the ICGR. In order to translate the ICGR economic agenda into specific recommendations, the Berks County Economic Partnership engaged Sasaki Architects PC, a practice associate of Sasaki Associates, Inc., for urban design and planning, and the Brookings Institution for market, strategy, and real estate advice in 2005. Over the course of a seven-month process from late November 2005 to June 2006, the Corridor Steering Committee met to discuss opportunities and refine the consultant recommendations. The Steering Committee represents a broad cross section of local leaders, including representatives from Berks County and the three participating municipalities: Reading, West Reading, and Wyomissing; and representatives from the Berks Economic Partnership, the Sovereign Center, the GoggleWorks, the Chamber of Commerce, RACC, the Latino Leadership, RiverPlace, and local businesses. The recommendations in this plan have been endorsed by elected officials in each of the three municipalities, representing a great stride forward in cooperative cross-jurisdictional planning and implementation. Through the leadership of the Brookings Institution, the municipalities have agreed to establish a Penn Corridor Joint Municipal Authority (JMA).

**PROCESS**

In 2004, a group of local leaders in Greater Reading organized themselves with a goal of positioning the area as a single identity with a joint stake in successful economic development. They engaged the Harvard think-tank, Institute for Competitive Inner Cities, led by Michael Porter. The Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading (ICGR) became a forum for discussion around the most appropriate economic opportunities for the area. Michael Porter and his staff conducted extensive research into employment and business factors, and brought their experience working in similar size cities across the country. From this research and discussion, four main economic sectors tailored to Greater Reading were highlighted:

- Hospitality, entertainment, and tourism cluster
- Professional and shared services cluster
- Nutrition and food processing cluster
- Wellness and healthcare cluster
reads regional advantages and demographic trends.

**CONTEXT**

Greater Reading has some unique location advantages as well as challenges. Reading is the fifth largest city in the State with a population of 81,000. The metropolitan area of 380,000 is a distinct center in the region, separate from Harrisburg, Lancaster, and the sprawl of Philadelphia, which reaches to the Pottstown area. Most of the metropolitan area population lives within a half-hour drive of the center of Greater Reading. In a little over an hour, a resident of downtown Reading can be in Center City Philadelphia; in the state capital, Harrisburg; hiking the Appalachian Trail; or fishing and hunting deep in the mountains of Pennsylvania.

From an economic perspective, Greater Reading lies within the economic shadow of Philadelphia, just as Philadelphia is shadowed by New York City. In general, migration tends to be out of New York City, and jobs and housing are moving west from Philadelphia. To take advantage of this position, Greater Reading needs to attract and retain businesses and residents who can benefit from proximity to major urban centers, but want to be in a mid-sized city. The competitive advantages of a mid-sized city tend to be both real estate values and quality of life. The implementation of the Penn Corridor master plan will take a step toward improving the quality of life while creating confidence for investment in the downtown areas.

Historically, the three jurisdictions of Reading, West Reading, and Wyomissing have been economically and physically linked. For many years, Penn Square in Reading served as the traditional commercial downtown for the region. Industry surrounded the center city along the waterways and rails, including the Vanity Fair textile mills at the western end of the Penn Corridor. Many of the industry leaders lived in the planned community of Wyomissing, and West Reading became a solid middle class community, supported by local shops along Penn Avenue. While many textile mills offered discount merchandise, Vanity Fair started the completely innovative practice of combining several outlets in one place, with the opening of the VF Outlet Village in 1970. The construction of the West Shore Bypass, with its links to Interstate 176 and 76, connected Reading to the region and also opened up development for more suburban retail areas in West Reading north of the Penn Corridor.

Reading lies at the crossroads of Route 422, which connects Harrisburg to Valley Forge, and Route 222, which connects Allentown to Lancaster. The West Shore Bypass, which has joint designation as US Route 422/222 as it crosses the corridor, provides regional highway access to the interstate system at I-76. The exit from the West Shore Bypass directly onto the Penn Corridor represents a terrific transportation advantage for the city center, but also becomes a barrier between the east and west sides of the corridor. The Penn Corridor retains the Business Route 422 designation from the intersection of the Conrad Weiser Parkway in Wyomissing east to Fifth Street in Reading. Business Route 222 also is designated on a portion of Penn Street between the river and Fifth Street in Reading.

**THE EVOLUTION OF THE CORRIDOR.**

- **1880s: One Regional Center**
- **1970s: Two separate Regional Centers**
- **2006: Desire one unified corridor with recent initiatives**
Land values along the corridor.
EXISTING DESTINATIONS AND INITIATIVES

The Penn Corridor acts as a spine that features many of the key destinations within Greater Reading. These destinations serve the local as well as the regional population and also draw visitors into the area. The two-mile length of the corridor, however, makes it difficult to sense a critical mass of these activities.

On the west side, the VF Outlet Village has been a destination for shoppers near and far for over thirty years. On the east side, the Sovereign Center Arena and Performing Arts Center offer sports, music, and other entertainment that draw people from a wide radius. The GoggleWorks, which opened in September 2005, has become a new cultural center, offering independent films, galleries, and artists studios and workshops.

The Reading Area Community College (RACC) has grown to be an important educational center on the east bank of the Schuylkill River at the Penn Corridor crossing. This important educational institution trains students of all ages for the workplace, offering a wide variety of transfer and career related courses. RACC also serves as a magnet that connects people to each other and to the activities in the city center. The new Miller Theater will become another important cultural destination for the region.

A number of other institutions and activities lie within a few blocks of the central spine of the Penn Corridor. The Reading Museum and the Reading Hospital are important regional facilities in West Reading. City and County government dominate parts of the corridor in Reading. The grand space of City Park, with its band shell and other recreational facilities, anchors the east end of the corridor.

Historically, the Schuylkill River has always been the life blood of the region and the city center, with its system of canals, mills, and later rail corridors. Today, the river represents tremendous potential for recreational use and heritage tourism. The 128-mile river corridor is designated as the Schuylkill River National Heritage Area, one of 23 such areas in the country and is managed by the Schuylkill River Greenway Association, in partnership with the National Park Service and the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Since 2004, the RiverPlace Development Corporation has become a local leader in the improvement of the river park system and the redevelopment of its edges.

Another important initiative affecting Greater Reading and the Penn Corridor in particular is the proposed Schuylkill Valley Metro system. This 62-mile commuter rail will link Greater Reading to Philadelphia, relieving traffic congestion in the suburbs of Philadelphia and making Reading a more competitive area to conduct business or for commuters. The cost of this system suggests that it is a long range proposal, yet station locations in West Reading and Reading would have tremendous economic development implications for the Penn Corridor and would also provide a local transit link between the two centers.
Primary cultural, shopping and entertainment destinations anchor and enliven the corridor.
The goal of the Penn Corridor is to unify many disparate pieces and create the perception of a single strong destination at the center of the region. This economic development strategy encourages cooperation with the understanding that the sum is greater than the parts, and that the perception of any one area can dramatically affect the perception of the whole. The approach to unifying the corridor is three-fold:

1. Celebrate the uniqueness of different places along the corridor
2. Define common elements that unify the corridor
3. Bridge the gap that is the major break between the development on either side of the river
Existing assets along the corridor can be catalysts for distinct districts.
The two-mile Penn Corridor has a wealth of existing activities and the potential to develop into a series of complementary, exciting districts. The districts are distinctly different in character, based on their history, building stock, mix of uses, and context. By encouraging diversity among these districts, a visitor—whether from the neighborhoods, region, or out of state—is more likely to stay longer, come back again, and continue to explore the depth of resources offered within the corridor. Project-based initiatives will reinforce the character and values of each distinct district.

The scale of the corridor, however, demands that some elements are common to the entire length. These unifying elements can take many forms including physical infrastructure links, marketing strategies, and administrative approaches. These unifying elements tend to be systems-based rather than project-based. Some of the physical elements make it easier for a visitor to recognize their arrival into the corridor, orient themselves along its length, and travel between places. Other aspects reflect economies of scale such as investment in fiber optics or unifying the maintenance and security of the corridor. Together, the investment in these systems will work to improve the overall perception of the corridor in the minds of residents and visitors.

The third approach is to overcome the half-mile gap between West Reading and Reading. While the highway and the river are two of the most significant assets along the corridor, together they create a gap that discourages pedestrian continuity and interrupts the urban fabric on either side. The recent initiative to improve the river as a natural and recreational asset accelerates the need to improve pedestrian access and visibility to this important resource. The challenge in this area is to balance pedestrian access with vehicular access and circulation. The exit and entrance ramps to the West Shore Bypass are the major gateway into Reading, West Reading, and to some degree Wyomissing. For drivers, this point of arrival sets their first impression of the corridor. From an economic development point of view, any improvements to the interchange need to maintain regional highway access.
Through all these efforts, the Penn Corridor must become a remarkable place, a destination that is sought out for the quality of specific venues as well as the status of being a central place where people conduct business, congregate, gather, and stroll. Investing in large catalytic projects such as the Sovereign Center needs to be complemented by the development of supporting, fine grain uses, including urban residential dwellings, restaurants, and local and destination retail. Civic spaces such as streets and parks provide the setting within which chance encounters happen, while also serving as the stage for more organized festivals and events.

At one level, the Penn Corridor will be read as a single place recognizable through consistent signage, the quality of the streetscape and its maintenance, and the connecting transportation systems. Unlike any other place in the region, the Penn Corridor should be the quintessential walkable urban district. In the constellation of cities, Greater Reading should be able to offer the best of a natural recreation setting in Berks County and the best of an interesting, vibrant city center. Supporting this centrality are:

- The strength of the institutions, like RACC, the Reading Hospital, and the Reading Museum;
- The quality of the regional attractions, like the VF Outlet Village, the Sovereign Center, the Sovereign Performing Arts Center, and Jazz Fest event;
- Private corporate commitment, such as Sovereign Bank, Carpenter Industries, the Reading Eagle, and many others;
- Existing neighborhoods, including the diversity of a growing Hispanic community that needs to be better integrated into the broader community;
- The arts community, represented by GoggleWorks and a number of downtown galleries;
- The presence of the Schuylkill River and the regional recreation system represented by the National Heritage Corridor, located in the very center of the Penn Corridor; and
- Transit nodes for the intra-city and inter-city buses as well as the potential for two stops along the future Schuylkill Valley Metro.

These assets are fundamental to the success of Greater Reading’s future, and each one needs to be continually reinforced and strengthened. None of these factors can be taken for granted and the many recent initiatives in Greater Reading underscore the importance of these factors to the local leadership.

New development will occur in strategic locations along the corridor where land is vacant or underutilized, such as surface parking areas. Infill development should be an opportunity to intensify the character of each of the special districts that make up the Penn Corridor. In a sense, these places will be punctuation points along an exciting and diverse corridor. In some areas, the development will meet a regional need such as a new downtown hotel near the Sovereign Center or a new movie theater in the GoggleWorks Arts District. In other places, the new program will not be a destination, but rather complementary uses such as housing, restaurants and local retail. In either event, articulation of the architecture and prominent locations, and integration with civic spaces can add to the general attraction of the corridor, adding more people to the street.

Successful urban districts are animated by movement, whether it is pedestrian on the sidewalk, bicycles and cars on busy streets, or transit passing through. All of these modes of travel are needed to overcome the distances along the corridor, which range from five- to ten-minute walks along different segments to the desire to connect from the anchor activities of the VF Outlet Village on the west to the Sovereign Performing Arts Center on the east. The reconfiguration of local transit should consider a straight line shuttle that travels back and forth along the corridor at frequent intervals. The familiarity and frequency of such a system, in combination with distinctive vehicles, will promote ridership. With such a system in place, shared parking is more likely to be successful. A more comprehensive parking system would even out the convenience of parking along the corridor, allowing people to park at one end and shuttle to the other or to simply park at one location and leave their car behind for the day or for the evening.
The chain of districts along the corridor are compact, complimentary, and connected.
3. DISTINCT PLACES

The character of development along the Penn Corridor varies considerably, ranging from ten-story high rises in downtown Reading, to two-story shops in West Reading, to warehouse structures at the VF Outlet Village, to residential apartments and rowhouses at either end. This variety of scale and uses is an opportunity to highlight the best of each area along the corridor and to create a series of distinctive specialty districts:

- Penn Square District
- Arts District
- Banks of the Schuylkill
- Chocolate Factory District
- The Avenue
- Wyomissing Square
Historic Series of the Square form 1880-today. Before the 1980s, Penn Square had a unified spatial quality strongly defined by the building edges. Subsequent alterations cluttered and divided the square.
Opportunities need to be targeted to strengthen each district. Together, these unique places will help achieve the economic development goal of promoting tourism and entertainment along the corridor, since the variety of offerings will appeal to different segments of the population of residents and visitors, and will encourage repeat trips and longer stays downtown. Each district has its own redevelopment and market potential as described below. Project-based investment will focus on infill housing, neighborhood retail, and the strategic deployment of destination retail, and cultural, sports and entertainment venues.
**PENN SQUARE DISTRICT**

Once the historic market center, Penn Square has continued to be the heart of downtown Reading. The widening of Penn Street between Fourth and Sixth Streets sets Penn Square apart from the rest of the two-mile corridor. Its prominence is highlighted by the historic buildings that speak to its commercial legacy. The influence of the Penn Square District extends eastward across the rail line to Eighth Street to include the Sovereign Center, opened in 2001 and hosting sports and music events ranging in size from 2,500 to 4,500 seats. The nearby Sovereign Performing Arts Center, which also opened in 2001, seats approximately 1,700 in an historic theater, which now home to the Reading Symphony Orchestra, Reading Civic Opera Society, and The Star Series, while also serving as the primary venue for the First Energy Berks Jazz Fest. As the primary financial, government, and event destination for the region, the Penn Square District serves as the eastern anchor for the corridor, complemented by residential uses that predominate further east.

In the future, the vitality of Penn Square will be enhanced by the addition of key destinations and new streetscapes that promote the civic nature of the Square and the potential for stronger ground floor retail. The planned Schuylkill Metro will have a stop within a block of the Penn Corridor at the restored station at Franklin and Seventh Street. The commuter rail access will connect the region to events at the Sovereign Center and other downtown destinations, and could also strengthen the connection from West Reading and Wyomissing to Reading.

For those conducting business in downtown or attending performances, a new ten-story hotel will provide more choices for overnight stays. The attached conference center will position Reading to attract regional events and business meetings, adding to the life of downtown. Active ground floor retail and restaurants will be essential to serve the Sovereign Center patrons and activate this stretch of the Penn Corridor. Structured parking will be placed mid-block to minimize the visual impact of such a structure on the life of the street.

Other infill development at the southwest corner of Penn Street and Seventh Street will help to bridge the life around the Sovereign Center with the activity in Penn Square itself. The program for this site could vary widely, including residential or office on the upper floors. At the ground floor, restaurants, retail or gallery space will open directly onto the street. Following the current trend for new downtown restaurants, the streets to the south of Penn Street could also support new infill development, including smaller scale endeavors.

Penn Square has gone through several transformations from a pedestrian mall in the 1970s and 1980s to the current landscaped median and bus stalls, which were completed in 1993. The character of Penn Square as a public space will be restored by removing the center landscaped median, which currently divides the space. The opening of the BARTA Transportation Center in 2002 relocated the bus transfer function from the Square, thereby reducing the need for the multiple bus stalls and shelters.

In the future, a new arrangement of the space in Penn Square will focus on wide sidewalks and stands of street trees along the face of the buildings to allow ground floor uses to spill out comfortably toward the street. Acting as a civic space that serves diverse residents and visitors alike, these wide plaza areas will be able to host programmed events such as sidewalk fairs, music, festivals, and farmers’
markets. The mix of retail uses should change over time to include more destination shopping and less service oriented stores, which are better located on side streets and in other streets within the neighborhoods. The new Sovereign Operations Center, with approximately 450 employees, will contribute to patrons using the plaza area and shops in the new Penn Square as will the many existing downtown employees and nearby residents.
ARTS DISTRICT

With significant investment in the Sovereign Center venues early in the decade, recent attention has shifted to the Arts District extending from Front Street to Third Street. This area is anchored by the recently completed GoggleWorks and the imminent completion of the Miller Theater, which is part of the Reading Area Community College (RACC). In this same area, RACC also has the Schmidt Training and Technology Center under construction. A new 12-screen movie complex on the corner of Second Street and Washington Street will complement the other uses and attract visitors into the area, especially in the evenings and on weekends. Active ground floor retail will skin the edge of a new parking garage in the district, which will provide shared parking for the many new uses in the Arts District.

As the public parks along the riverfront extend north, the Arts District will form a critical link between Downtown Reading and RiverPlace. Already GoggleWorks has assembled a critical mass of artists, who bring 18-hour life and activity into this part of the city near the center of the Penn Corridor. The ground floor gallery, café, cinema, and programmed events draw visitors from the city and the region into the Arts District. The 500-seat Miller Theater will provide a venue for smaller events, complementing the larger Sovereign venues.

Second Street, themed as the Arts Walk, will celebrate the unique identity of the district with a dramatic streetscape featuring under-lit glass paving and public art displays. As the spine of the district, it ties together the multiple arts and entertainment venues and provides a powerful link to Penn Street and the RACC Gateway.

Over time, the City and transportation entities must decide where the best location is for the inter-city bus terminal. The reconstruction or the relocation of this facility, which is now on Third Street, will improve this section of the Penn Corridor and the area around the station. This facility links Reading to surrounding towns and cities and to Philadelphia, and ideally would be located as an intermodal facility closer to one of the planned Schuylkill Valley Metro Stations. Over time, infill may occur on the “missing teeth” along lower Penn Street. In the short term these surface parking areas should be improved, especially along the street frontage.
BANKS OF THE SCHUYLKILL

The Schuylkill riverfront, once predominately industry-oriented, is being reclaimed as a major recreational and environmental corridor. RiverPlace is part of the larger National Heritage Corridor that links Greater Reading to the region. Over time, the riverfront will provide a more meaningful amenity and event space for adjacent neighborhoods in the City and Townships.

As a central gathering point, the banks of the Schuylkill will complement other entertainment activities along the Penn Corridor. The existing lawns and the extension of these parks will enhance the riverfront for the Riverfest and as one of the many venues for the Jazz Fest and other festivals. Many new features on both sides of the river will attract visitors in their own right, while more continuous connections along and across the river will tie the entire riverfront into regional trails and into the nearby districts and neighborhoods. With its restoration and new lighting, the Penn Bridge will make a dramatic statement visible from both banks of the river, the water, and the highway. The character of the riverfront is a striking departure from the urban fabric on either side. Development of open space along the riverfront must be able to accommodate large crowds, while also creating peaceful settings that can be enjoyed on a day-to-day basis.

On the east bank, in place of the former surface parking, a waterfront amphitheatre will provide a new venue for outdoor concerts and events. Its raised stage with canvas top will be oriented northward, framing the long view of the river, and providing optimal viewing angles. The curved stepping grass terraces will offer comfortable seating for large audiences, while providing a comfortable scale for more solitary enjoyment of the river and informal everyday use. Behind the amphitheater, a lawn area will attract children for casual play during performances, but could also accommodate overflow crowds during exceptionally large events such as the Riverfest or the Fourth of July celebration.

At the entry plaza at the foot of Court Street, an interactive labyrinth play fountain will create a sparkling draw to the neighboring Arts District, and an exciting diversion for the kids. During winter, the plaza will transform into an outdoor skating venue and portable market stalls to diversify the programs seasonally. A restaurant and community facility at the base of the Penn Bridge will transition from the upper level of the bridge sidewalk to the lower level of the RiverPlace parks via elevator and stairs. Outdoor dining terraces and rooftop overlooks would make this a destination for many.

The RACC Campus overlooks the Schuylkill River with lawns that provide access to the water’s edge and continuous linear access. The riverfront in this area will include several interpretive displays highlighting the former canal locks, the important role of rail, and the changing nature of the river over time and in flood events.

The restoration of the RACC pedestrian bridge will allow pedestrians to cross to the western bank, providing long views down the river from its slightly
elevated deck. At the bridge landing on the west bank, the new Window on the Water Park will provide a vital link in the connections to the Wyomissing Creek, while providing a striking view back across the river to Downtown Reading. Along the west bank, a new boardwalk will allow visitors a quiet respite from the city as they walk through forest and wetlands, and along the river. Connections back into the street grid will provide a direct tie to the nearby Chocolate Factory District on the other side of the highway.
**CHOCOLATE FACTORY DISTRICT**

Situated in West Reading between Third Avenue and the highway, the Chocolate Factory District is an essential link between the Borough and the River. Named for the chocolate manufacturer R.M. Palmer Co., and located on Second Avenue, this area features a number of impressive historic loft structures suitable for conversion to residential and urban entertainment uses. The resulting mix of uses, including many of the existing manufacturing related industries, allows the area to become a creative, vibrant riverfront warehouse district oriented to both residents and visitors.

One of the early projects for the district is located on the site of the former Penn View Motel, on the corner of Penn and Third Avenue. This site could feature up to 110 units in a mix of housing types such as townhouses, loft apartments, and a ten-story residential tower. By orienting the buildings to the street, the sidewalk will become an active zone that attracts pedestrians from the Corridor along Third Avenue and down Franklin Street.

Streetscape improvements and infill development along both Franklin and Chestnut Streets will strengthen connections between the district and the riverfront. Franklin Street, framed by the five-story Palmer building and a dramatic railway overpass, creates a powerful passage down the hill to First Avenue, and provides direct pedestrian access to the riverfront boardwalk through the highway underpass. Chestnut Street provides a more gently sloping route from the West Reading neighborhoods to the RACC pedestrian bridge and the future Window on the Water Park.
THE AVENUE

Penn Avenue in West Reading is the Borough’s traditional “main street.” The district features over 80 shops and restaurants along its five-block length, 35 of which have opened since 1999. Streetscape improvements were completed in 2003, further enhancing the character and quality of streets and sidewalks. With its traditional charm and critical mass of locally owned shops, the Avenue serves as both a local and regional destination, serving the surrounding communities including the nearby Reading Hospital and Medical Center, the region’s largest employer with over 4,000 employees. The Avenue is actively managed and promoted and features a number of events, including First Thursday, Art of the Avenue, Community Outreach Day, Sidewalk Sale, Taste of West Reading, and Holiday Glow Celebration.

Having grown up along the route to downtown Reading, the Avenue has evolved over the years into an eclectic character that is in places both auto and pedestrian dominated. The approach from the west, for instance, reveals a street with two very different sides—to the south, a mix of traditional one- to three-story houses and shops with a strong front on the sidewalk edge, while to the north a mix of auto-oriented, one-story commercial structures, which are set back from the street behind lawns or parking and interspersed with isolated two- to three-story historic structures. This pattern carries on for almost the entire length of the district, until the 600 block, where the Avenue is framed on both sides by the historic fine grained commercial and residential building fabric. This segment, which has retail facing onto both sides of the street and active sidewalks, provides a model for future development along the corridor.

The proposed mixed-use development project on the 500 block presents a dramatic opportunity to extend the two-sided street and further strengthen the function and identity of the district. The project will replace the strip shopping center and parking lot with a new street oriented shop front building with upper story loft housing. A new parking structure located behind the buildings and hidden from view will replace the former parking and provides an additional supply for the district. The articulation of detail and scale in the building façades will allow the two- to four-story structure to blend and complement its surrounding context. Over time, other infill sites along the northern side of the street could be redeveloped, further activating the sidewalk, and extending the vitality of the district.
View of the Avenue - proposed
**WYOMISSING SQUARE**

Anchored by the 450,000 square foot VF Outlet Village, Wyomissing Square is a destination retail district that serves as the western anchor of the Corridor. Located along the rail corridor, one block off Penn Avenue, the district is characterized by a collection of historic mill buildings that contrast in scale and character to the finer grain of shops and houses located along Penn Avenue.

Beginning as a 19th century center for textile and manufacturing industry, the district shifted towards a retail focus in the 1970s with the conversion of the Berkshire Knitting Mills, once the largest hosiery mill in the world, to the VF Outlet Village. Growing from a single store in 1970, the VF Outlet Village now features over 70 stores and is one of Greater Reading's major tourist destinations, drawing four to five million visitors each year.

Next door, across Park Street, a 350,000 square foot manufacturing facility is being converted into a hotel-retail-residential development. The two-story facility, built in the early 1800s for the textile industry, now stands largely vacant except for a restaurant located in its northwest corner. The new complex, developed by Brickstone, will include a 130-room hotel, nearly 100,000 square feet of retail, and 70 apartment units, with parking and retail occupying the lower level.

Infill development on the surface parking lots along north side of Penn Avenue will strengthen the district by improving the connections between the corridor and the VF Outlet Village. With the surrounding urban amenities, this area could be a prime location for urban living, building on the trend set by the Brickstone development, and bringing activity and vibrancy to the street. Four-story lofts and townhouses, punctuated with ground floor retail at strategic locations, will provide additional housing choices for those wishing to live in an urban setting, while providing a stronger 18-hour presence in the district. Structured parking will be located in the center of the block or facing side streets, minimizing the visual effects on main streets.

In this district, Park Road is an important north-south connection that crosses the rail line to the north and links to the Berkshire Heights neighborhood, the retail area along Papermill Road, and several access and exit ramps to the regional highway system. In the next block, the Metro Valley commuter rail station has been proposed for the end of Eighth Street, less than a quarter-mile north of Penn Avenue. In order to signal the importance of the Eighth Street gateway to the rail station, a new pedestrian square is proposed at the corner of Penn Avenue, and new residential loft buildings will extend the residential fabric of the street.
View of Wyomissing Square - proposed
4. CONNECT WITH SYSTEMS

With many distinct districts to visit, the connections between the districts become paramount. These systems will be the counter-balancing force that unifies the corridor. The common elements reinforce continuity and connection, highlighting the unique places along the way.

Physical systems range from transportation to utility infrastructure to signage and other design elements. For some elements, communication among public entities will be required to promote consistency. Other projects will require agreements about strategy and design and joint funding. In some cases, such as major infrastructure projects, a concerted joint effort of interests all along the corridor will be necessary to achieve results.
Opportunities for shared parking facilities. Good local transit service enables a more distributed parking supply, allowing visitors to ‘park once’ and still have easy access to all the attractions along the corridor.
The civic realm connects the districts
A consistent system of wayfinding and signage will be one of the most powerful initiatives in terms of changing perceptions, branding the corridor, and orienting visitors to promote convenience and familiarity. A wayfinding system considers the entire sequence of arrival, beginning with the regional highway system, leading vehicles to parking, and their passengers out onto the street. At each level, the amount of information must be minimized and tailored to the speed at which the visitor is traveling. The consistent palette of materials, typeface, logos, and colors will help brand the Corridor as a unified place. Within this palette, variations in the design can promote the different districts.

On the regional highway system, trailblazers are installed in coordination with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT). Wherever possible, “brown signs” are used for historic and cultural facilities, and are the most recognizable and desirable, but must follow state guidelines and thresholds for the size of the venue. At gateway points, such as the interchange, decisions must be made about turning. Signage in these locations announces arrival at the Corridor, but also directs the visitor to the different districts and primary destinations. Once in a district, the style of the signage design may vary and smaller destinations and attractions can be announced. Consistent and clear signage to parking is essential, however. Pedestrian level signage allows for a much greater amount of information, including maps and interpretive materials, which enrich the sense of place.
The consistent quality of the streetscape will encourage pedestrian movement. Walking the entire length of the district would take about forty minutes. This is not an impossible distance, but suggests that people are more likely to stroll within different districts or to adjacent districts that are within a five- to ten-minute walk. The design details of the streetscape may vary, reflecting the different character and scale of Wyomissing, West Reading, and Reading. Each segment of the Penn Corridor streetscape, however, should be composed of high quality details that integrate gracious street trees, broad sidewalks, pedestrian scaled lighting, interesting paving materials, and street furniture that will encourage people to occupy the space. In the area of the highway interchange, more significant interventions are required and are discussed in Section 5.
PUBLIC ART

Investment in public art is another way to reinforce the significance of the corridor as a special place in the region. While the individual pieces might vary considerably, the idea that the corridor is known for its art will be communicated to visitors. Investment in the arts will continue a tradition that already exists in Greater Reading and will make it more visible. Art installations, such as the labyrinth on the river, are physically engaging while other pieces are just thought provoking. Through their original work, local artists can create a unique identity for the city and the region, just as Waterfire has for Providence, Rhode Island.

PARKING

While parking is distributed locally, a shared parking strategy and management approach will take advantage of more opportune locations for structured parking, a consistent level of signage and quality for each facility, and the ability to reduce the overall numbers by encouraging people to park in one place for multiple activities. Consistent on-street parking adds to the overall supply, adds convenience, and at the same time protects the pedestrians on the sidewalk.
Several buses pass along the Penn Corridor today, but generally the current system is organized as a hub and spoke that converges on the BARTA transportation center. In this configuration, buses bring people from outlying areas into the center, where transfers are possible to reach other outlying areas. While many buses travel along the Penn Corridor, the different lines tend to leave the Transportation Center in platoons, thereby reducing the frequency and distribution of buses while also compromising the ability to transfer efficiently.

To improve connections within a downtown area, a short haul system is needed that travels frequently along a simple straight line route, moving back and forth along a relatively short distance throughout the day and evening. Vehicles should be sized appropriately for the expected ridership. In this configuration, there is never any doubt where the transit is going, and the reliability of service is increased.

Transit systems vary from simple buses to bus rapid transit to light rail transit on fixed rails. Headways measure the ability of the transit system to move from stop to stop, where fixed rail systems offer the best headways and buses moving through congested traffic make the slowest headways. Fixed rail systems require much greater investment in the initial infrastructure, but add much greater value to the surrounding real estate where there is confidence that the transit route will endure.

Under present funding scenarios, bus rapid transit systems have become popular because of the lower upfront costs. Ideally, these systems have a dedicated bus lane where the right-of-way is sufficient (at least 100 feet wide) and traffic allows. Other features include special vehicles and expedited signal timing to allow the buses to advance through lights. When necessary, these systems share the right-of-way with automobiles, but this significantly reduces the headways. Opportunities to improve the streetscape are bundled with the funding for the stations and the dedicated lane.

The simplest intervention is a “trolley” system that uses rubber wheeled vehicles with a different identity from other city buses and make a short-haul trip through the downtown. Since funding is not always available for major transit systems, some cities implement interim solutions to build ridership and a constituency that will support heavier transit investment. The operation of the interim transit must be viewed positively, however, to achieve this long-term goal.
As an economic development strategy, the Schuylkill Valley Metro will transform Greater Reading, by connecting downtown West Reading/Wyomissing and downtown Reading much more directly into the heart of Center City Philadelphia. The downtown stations would provide a competitive advantage to the Penn Corridor area for both business investment and residential investment. The 62-mile corridor is one of the fastest growing regions in southeastern Pennsylvania and follows existing freight rail rights-of-way, which are both active and inactive. The project is jointly led by the Berks Area Reading Transportation Authority and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority. At this point, a feasibility study has been recommended to pursue the next steps of major investment study (MIS) and the subsequent draft and final environmental impact statement.
The stations for commuter rail can be a showcase for visitors.

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

A concerted effort to invest in fiber optics for the Penn Corridor is another way to advance the downtown’s competitive advantages. Other cities have been working on establishing wireless internet connections in the downtown. Since technology changes so rapidly, these efforts must be monitored to ensure that the investment will be useful for the long term.

**MARKETING, PROGRAMMING AND OPERATIONS**

Another strategy for unifying the corridor is to engage in shared activities that overcome municipal and other jurisdictional boundaries. The recent ICGR and the current Berks Economic Partnership initiatives are indicative of this “soft” non-physical component. The formalization of this collaborative effort into a Joint Management Authority (JMA) will establish a long-term method of coordinating marketing, programming, and operations. All of the programmed events that happen in Greater Reading today should be considered unifying elements for the corridor. Similarly, the “clean and safe” programs that are run by the Reading Downtown District and the Borough of West Reading offer the potential to merge these services to achieve economies of scale and ensure a consistent quality of maintenance and a single familiar identity for the downtown “ambassadors.” A JMA or other similar entity could also be instrumental in serving as a central source for data and information about the corridor, including real estate, tourism, neighborhood, and business statistics. A corollary to the collection of data is the use of that data to promote and market the corridor to visitors, investors, metropolitan residents, and others. Basically, the joint marketing needs to focus on getting the word out about the competitive advantages of Greater Reading and the Penn Corridor, and the positive attributes that distinguish this area from all other areas in the region and the country.
5. THE BRIDGE

The largest gap in the corridor lies at its midpoint and spans the West Shore Bypass and the river. This half-mile stretch extends from the West Reading railroad overpass near Second Avenue to the landing of the Schuylkill Bridge in Reading at Second Street. If the goal is to unify the corridor, then certainly addressing this segment and reinforcing the idea of a bridge rather than a gap would better connect the two sides of the Penn Corridor.

About half of this span is covered by the 100 year old Schuylkill River Bridge. This bridge, which is in need of repairs, has relatively narrow sidewalks, insufficient lighting, and wide travel lanes encouraging a high speed of travel for automobiles. It crosses high above the river, offering spectacular views from its balustrade, yet the desire to linger is hampered by the traffic. Below the bridge on the east bank, the RACC campus spreads out in view, but is impossible to reach until the landing at Second Street.
The existing highway interchange

The other half of the journey crosses through the cloverleaf interchange between the Penn Corridor and the West Shore Bypass. The Penn Corridor crosses on a viaduct with embankments around the entrance and exit ramps and the highway passes under the elevated bridge structure. The dimensions of this relatively small interchange would not meet current interstate highway standards. The highway entrance and exit ramps have free right turns, and the width of the Penn Corridor and its relationship to the interstate encourage high rates of speed in the area. While sidewalks do exist, there is little in the way of pedestrian amenities and there are no signalized crosswalks. For pedestrians, especially those needing handicap accessibility, this journey is almost impossible and certainly unpleasant. While the interchange is the primary gateway into Reading, West Reading and Wyomissing, there is almost no signage to orient and direct visitors to their destinations. The landscape is open lawn and presents a barren arrival setting.

A number of strategies were explored during the current study and the range of recommendations is illustrated. In the short term, key investments in either landscape plantings or public art or both would certainly improve the character of the bridge area and establish a strong identity for the corridor. A field of light towers would combine art with the strong nighttime identity of the center point to the corridor.

In the long term, the interchange should be reconfigured to enhance pedestrian crosswalks while still maintaining sufficient stacking for cars exiting the highway. If possible, the exit and entrance ramps should be controlled by signals or at a minimum by stop signs. A diamond interchange with entrance and exit ramps on the outside lanes of the highway is a typical design for urban locations. This arrangement would also free up space on either side of the interchanges, which could be put to use as parkland along the riverfront and developable parcels adjacent to the Chocolate District. In reconfiguring the interchange area, Penn Corridor should be designed for the same speeds as are found on either side in the heart of the downtown areas, involving the traffic calming elements of narrower lane widths and, where possible, fewer lanes since the street section continues as a quiet urban street to the east and west. Street trees, wider sidewalks, and improved lighting in combination with signalized crosswalks will make it possible to traverse from one side of the river to the other.

Ongoing discussions with PennDOT are necessary to scope out the extent of the repairs needed for the Schuylkill River Bridge. The slight narrowing of lanes, the replacement of the street lights, and improvements to the balustrade would enhance the pedestrian experience along this bridge. Over time, some development on the east bank below could be placed adjacent to the bridge to allow for an accessible connection from the upper bridge level to the trail systems along the riverbanks below.
An overview of the existing interchange and phases 1 and 2 of improvements

View of the Penn Corridor at the interchange - existing

View of the Penn Corridor at the interchange - proposed first phase
6. IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation strategy outlines the specific steps necessary to move forward, setting this within a framework of time as well as responsibility for key tasks. The strategic and implementation plans for each municipality have been assembled by the Brookings Institution working closely with the leadership in each locality and drawing in county, regional and state entities as necessary.

PHASING

Building on the initiatives already underway, the initial phase of projects is clustered in key districts. With the GoggleWorks completed, the remaining infill development around this anchor will be important to its success. These investments will ensure that the Arts District not only has anchors, but also has the supporting parking, retail, entertainment, and residential activities around it.
**Priority Penn Corridor Projects**

**Wyomissing Square Site**
- Hotel: 100,000 sf
- Retail: 140,000 sf
- Residential: 270 du
- Parking: 1,100 spaces
- Net New Development: 545,000 sf
- Parcel Size: 540,000 sf
- FAR: 1
- Floors: 2 to 5

**Mixed Use on the “Avenue”**
- Retail: 90,000 sf
- Residential: 60 du
- Parking: 215
- Net New Development: 165,000 sf
- Parcel Size: 157,000 sf
- FAR: 1.1
- Floors: 2 to 4

**Signature Housing Site**
- Residential: 107 du
- Condominiums 55, Apartment 25, Townhouse 27
- Parking: 120 spaces
- Net New Development: 153,000 sf
- Parcel Size: 90,000 sf
- FAR: 1.7
- Floors: 3 to 9
**SECOND & WASHINGTON ST.**
- Multi-Plex: 30,000 sf
- Retail: 15,000 sf
- Residential: 55 du
- Parking: 480 spaces
- Net Development: 110,000 sf
- Parcel Size: 135,000 sf
- FAR: .85
- Floors: 2 to 5

**CONVENTION HOTEL SITE**
- Hotel: 200,000 sf
- Retail: 5,000 sf
- Residential: 40 du
- Parking: 830 spaces
- Net Development: 253,000 sf
- Parcel Size: 114,000 sf
- FAR: 2.2
- Floors: 4 to 10
LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL OF CORRIDOR

**WYOMISSING SQUARE DISTRICT**
- NET NEW DEVELOPMENT = 460,000 sf
- NET REHAB POTENTIAL = NA
- TOTAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL = 460,000 sf
- PARCEL AREA = 420,000 sf
- PARKING SPACES = 1,560 spaces

**THE “AVENUE” DISTRICT**
- NET NEW DEVELOPMENT = 195,000 sf
- NET REHAB POTENTIAL = NA
- TOTAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL = 195,000 sf
- PARCEL AREA = 200,000 sf
- PARKING SPACES = 500 spaces

**CHOCOLATE FACTORY DISTRICT**
- NET NEW DEVELOPMENT = 500,000 sf
- NET REHAB POTENTIAL = 175,000 sf
- TOTAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL = 675,000 sf
- PARCEL AREA = 580,000 sf
- PARKING SPACES = 1,000 spaces

**TOTAL DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY**
- GROSS DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL = 2,100,000 sf
- GROSS PARCEL AREA = 1,680,000 sf
- GROSS PARKING SPACES (NEW) = 5,000 spaces
### The Banks District
- **Net New Development**: 15,000 sf
- **Net Rehab Potential**: NA

### Arts District
- **Net New Development**: 360,000 sf
- **Net Rehab Potential**: 65,000 sf
- **Total Development Potential**: 425,000 sf
- **Parcel Area**: 314,000 sf
- **Parking Spaces**: 900 spaces

### Penn Square District
- **Net New Development**: 300,000 sf
- **Net Rehab Potential**: 35,000 sf
- **Total Development Potential**: 335,000 sf
- **Parcel Area**: 167,000 sf
- **Parking Spaces**: 880 spaces
JOINT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Concurrent with this study, the Brookings Institution worked closely with each of the three municipalities to develop strategic and implementation plans, coordinating with the Sasaki urban design and planning. This interactive process was effective in developing an agreement to establish a Penn Corridor Joint Municipal Authority to coordinate development efforts along the corridor.

The daylong workshops with leaders in each community produced specific recommendations for implementation, which are summarized in the sections below.

READING STRATEGIC & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

**Urban Character:** Downtown Reading is meant to be the pedestrian gathering place for the metropolitan area. There will be a strong effort made to attract all socio-economic and ethnic groups present in the region to downtown. Downtown Reading is one of three with urban character in the Penn Corridor Joint Management Authority (Penn Corridor JMA). However, it has, and will continue to have in the future, the most density. The density of downtown Reading is in the range of 3.0 to 4.0 net floor area ratio (FAR) today, which is close to 50% higher density than Wyomissing and West Reading.

**Downtown Values:** The revitalization taking place in downtown Reading allows for a mutual understanding between various economic and ethnic communities. In particular, the fast growing Hispanic community needs to be better integrated into the broader community and take their place as one of the major drivers of Reading’s vitality and growth. Implementation: Mayor’s office.

**Market Rate Attached Housing:** Encourage the development of market rate, high density housing as an early step in the redevelopment process. While it is recognized that affordable housing will be an issue eventually, it is not an issue at the moment, and having middle and upper middle income households moving downtown will help achieve more of a balanced mix of housing choices, increase the tax base and provide support for the new retail that is planned for downtown. There is a goal of 300-400 dwelling units over the next 2-3 years. The example of the project that demonstrates this strategy is Al Boscov’s new rental apartment mid-rise project. Implementation: See catalytic developer strategy below.

**Regional and Locally-Oriented Retail:** The regional retail focus should be restaurants (both white table cloth and ethnic), antiques, specialty boutiques and a high end grocery store (e.g., Whole Foods). The locally serving retail includes Hispanic restaurants, grocery, and other daily shopping stores. Aside from the high-end grocery store, recruitment should be focused on regional and locally owned retailers since they are most likely to be drawn to a revitalizing downtown, unlike national chains which both are more likely to go to the suburbs and are not unique. The restaurant recruitment fund developed by Al Boscov and the Greater Berks Development Fund are excellent examples of how this strategy will be implemented. Clustering the stores from each type of retail on one or more streets within an easy walk of each other is considered the best approach to achieve critical mass quickly. It should be noted that export or regional-serving employment strategies were not chosen, except insofar as there is employment generated by each of these strategies, since it was premature, given the state of the revitalization effort. Research and experience in downtowns throughout the country...
has shown that export and regional employment tends to come in the later stages of downtown revitalization. Implementation: Berks Economic Partnership to head task force to encourage the development of an urban entertainment district around GoggleWorks, to encourage the restaurant fund, and to encourage the creation of different retail districts in downtown.

**Cultural/Sports:** Actively participate in Penn Corridor JMA events (festivals, parades, etc.) as well as continue to sponsor unique West Reading community events. Another focus of this strategy is to begin the discussion that if and when a new baseball stadium is needed for the Reading Phillies, it should be located in downtown. This is due to the fact that downtown baseball stadiums perform better economically, add economic vitality to the walkable neighborhood surrounding it if designed properly, and can be less expensive since there are opportunities for shared parking with office uses. Office parking is used primarily during the weekday, while games are generally played at night or on the weekends. This also increases the value of the downtown parking structures. The vast majority of sports venues (baseball and football stadiums and arenas) have been placed downtown since the opening of Camden Yards in downtown Baltimore 15 years ago for the above reasons. A study of the need for a new stadium should be undertaken. Implementation: Reading City Manager will form a task force to examine the potential of a new baseball stadium that would be built in downtown Reading.

**Movies:** Encourage the development of the 12-screen movie theater currently under planning by Al Boscov as an entertainment anchor. The state-of-the-art facility should attract over 500,000 people downtown, primarily at night and on weekends, who are not coming presently. This will spark numerous retail and housing development. Implementation: See catalytic developer strategy below

**Nature:** Encourage Reading as a Greenway (Berks County Conservancy) as well as the RiverPlace Master Plan with the development of the Riverwalk project, connecting downtown Reading to the Schuylkill River and to West Reading. Embracing the river or harbor is a proven initial redevelopment strategy undertaken by numerous successful downtowns, including Chattanooga, Baltimore, Chicago, downtown New York, Portland (OR), and Providence, among many others. Implementation: Berks County Conservancy continues to lead the effort for the development of RiverPlace.

**Conventions:** Increase the convention business, especially encouraging overnight convention-related visits. This will be accomplished by building a new 3-star, business hotel adjacent to the Sovereign Center, planned to be developed by Al Boscov, and by targeting regional and state conferences and conventions to come to Reading. Implementation: Berks Economic Partnership will lead the task force that, following the announcement of the new hotel adjacent to the Sovereign Center, will start a new promotional campaign to attract mid-sized conventions and conferences to downtown Reading.

**Water, Sewer and Electric:** Proactively ensure that high speed fiber optics is in place for the implementation of the economic development employment strategy of attracting financial services firms when this strategy becomes viable for downtown. Implementation: Kim Murphy will lead the task force to ensure that high speed fiber optics will be in place in downtown. Participate in the Penn Corridor JMA lighting, sound and signage upgrade programs. Implementation: Lee Olson will lead a task force in developing a master plan for the streetscape upgrade to the Penn Corridor.

**Transportation System to Downtown:** Working with the Penn Corridor JMA, examine the options for providing bus and/or rail (trolley) connections along the three miles of the Corridor. In addition, encourage the commuter rail conversion that will result in a station near the Penn Corridor at the original train station. Design these transit systems and their stations to maximize the redevelopment potential. Examine means by which the Penn Corridor can be more pedestrian friendly. Implementation: Dennis Louwers will lead the transportation task force.
**Security/Cleanliness:** The work of the existing non-profit Downtown Improvement District and the City have improved cleanliness and safety of downtown, but the perception remains that the downtown is unclean and unsafe. The implementation of the “clean and safe” strategy will help change the perception, but the larger marketing effort of the JMA must make a push to change this perception as well. “When we get rid of fear, we win.”

**Implementation:** The Downtown Improvement District will lead a task force to determine how to upgrade the current level of service downtown.

**Parking:** Like many downtowns, there is a perception of not enough parking in downtown when the real issue is a need for marketing and wayfinding. This will be especially true when the new parking deck to support GoggleWorks and the movie theater is complete. Encourage a communication system to assist visitors in finding the available parking and consider an overall management system to improve the effectiveness of existing parking assets. Downtown Reading will be part of a potential corridor parking management system managed by the Penn Corridor JMA. Implementation: The Chamber of Commerce will lead the parking task force to recommend options for parking management.

**Building Regulatory Reforms:** Develop and implement an overlay, form-based code for downtown that will replace existing zoning. This will “make the right things easy.” Implementation: The City Planning Department, working with the Director of Planning, will lead a task force looking at the possibility of an overlay zone for downtown.

**Community Involvement/Residents:** Coordinate with the Penn Corridor JMA to develop a comprehensive outreach strategy, including newspaper inserts/questionnaires, neighborhood meetings, a speaker’s bureau, etc., to convey the strategic plan and obtain feedback to modify over time. Implementation: Coordinate with the Penn Corridor JMA on this issue.

**Community Involvement/Non-Profit Implementation Organizations:** Empower the Penn Corridor JMA to both coordinate the management of the Penn Corridor and be the “keeper of the flame” for the downtown West Reading strategy. The individual or company who will be the leader of this organization will not do everything that is part of the strategy, but will ensure that all aspects of the strategy are being done and, if necessary, find alternative methods of implementing the strategy if adjustments are required. Implementation: Support the creation of the Penn Corridor JMA.

**Catalytic Developer:** Al Boscov has demonstrated his commitment and willingness to assume the role of catalytic developer for downtown through his various projects, which include GoggleWorks, the movie theater, retail wrapping the new city parking garage, the rental apartment project, the new hotel, and the restaurant development fund. The strategy implementation should take the Boscov development plans into consideration to ensure they are integrated into the overall strategy. Implementation: The Penn Corridor JMA will continually coordinate with the Al Boscov development efforts.

**Investor/Financial Institution Marketing:** Work with the Penn Corridor JMA to create a revolving equity investment fund to encourage redevelopment projects in downtown. Coordinate the efforts of the City, Greater Berks Development Fund (GBDF) and Our City Reading in the creation of a revolving fund. Implementation: Greater Berks Development Fund will lead the task force to develop the revolving equity fund.

**Metropolitan Area Marketing:** Work with the Penn Corridor JMA to create a marketing plan for the Penn Corridor in general, and Reading in particular, for the residents of the city, region and eventually outside of the region. Implementation: Berks Economic Partnership to develop a comprehensive marketing campaign, coordinating with the Penn Corridor JMA.
**WEST READING STRATEGIC AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

**Urban Character:** Downtown West Reading is meant to be the pedestrian gathering place for the town. There will be a strong effort to attract all socio-economic and ethnic groups present in the West Reading to downtown. Downtown West Reading is one of three places with urban character in the Penn Corridor JMA. However, it has, and will continue to have in the future, the least density of the three. The density of downtown West Reading is in the range of 1.0 to 1.5 net FAR today and will likely only see marginal average increases in that level of density, though the Tulpehocken and the former motel development sites probably will and should have higher densities.

**Downtown Values:** The revitalization that has taken place in downtown West Reading has and will continue to focus on the historic nature of the town from its founding in the 19th century. In addition, this strategy recognizes that the Schuylkill River is a major asset that has been ignored in the recent past. The connection to the river will be re-established, which also connects West Reading to downtown Reading.

**Market Rate Attached Housing:** Encourage the development of market rate, high density housing, especially on the Tulpehocken and former motel redevelopment sites.

**Regional and Locally-Oriented Retail:** The regional retail focus should be restaurants (both white tablecloth and ethnic), antiques and specialty boutiques. Recruitment should be focused on regional and locally owned retailers since they are most likely to be drawn to downtown West Reading, unlike national chains which both are more likely to go to the suburbs and are not unique. It should be noted that export or regional-serving employment strategies were not chosen, except insofar as there is employment generated by each of these strategies, since it was premature, given the state of the revitalization effort.

**Cultural/Sports:** Actively participate in Penn Corridor JMA events (festivals, parades, etc.) as well as continue to sponsor unique West Reading community events.

**Nature:** Encourage Schuylkill River Greenway (Berks County Conservancy) as well as the RiverPlace Master Plan with the development of the Riverwalk project, connecting downtown Reading to the Schuylkill River and to West Reading. Embracing the river or harbor is a proven initial redevelopment strategy undertaken by numerous successful downtowns, including Chattanooga, Baltimore, Chicago, downtown New York, Portland (OR), and Providence, among many others.

**Water, Sewer and Electric:** Participate in the Penn Corridor JMA lighting, sound and signage upgrade programs.

**Transportation System to Downtown:** Working with the Penn Corridor JMA, examine the options for providing bus and/or rail (trolley) connections along the two miles of the Corridor. In addition, encourage the commuter rail conversion that will result in a station on the Penn Corridor at the original train station. Design these transit systems and their stations to maximize redevelopment potential.

**Security/Cleanliness:** Work with the Penn Corridor JMA to continue the town’s effort to increase cleanliness and safety (real and perceived).

**Parking:** Like many downtowns, there is a perception of not enough parking in downtown West Reading. Encourage a communication system to assist visitors in finding the available parking and consider an overall management system to improve the effectiveness of existing parking assets. The town will consider participating in building a parking structure for downtown projects. Downtown West Reading will be part of a potential corridor parking management system managed by the Penn Corridor JMA.
Building Regulatory Reforms: Develop and implement an overlay, form-based code for downtown that will replace existing zoning. This will “make the right things easy.”

Community Involvement/Residents: Coordinate with the Penn Corridor JMA to develop a comprehensive outreach strategy, including newspaper inserts/questionnaires, neighborhood meetings, a speaker’s bureau, etc., to convey the strategic plan and obtain feedback to modify over time.

Community Involvement/Non-Profit Implementation Organizations: Through legislation, empower the Penn Corridor JMA to both coordinate the management of the Penn Corridor and be the “keeper of the flame” for the downtown West Reading strategy. The individual or company who will be the leader of this organization will not do everything that is part of the strategy but will ensure that all aspects of the strategy are being done and, if necessary, find alternative methods of implementing the strategy if adjustments are required.

Investor/Financial Institution Marketing: Work with the Penn Corridor JMA to create a revolving equity investment fund to encourage redevelopment projects in downtown.

Metropolitan Area Marketing: Work with the Penn Corridor JMA to create a marketing plan for the Penn Corridor in general, and West Reading in particular, for the residents of the town, region and eventually outside the region.

**Wyomissing Strategic and Implementation Plan**

Urban Character: Downtown Wyomissing is meant to be the pedestrian gathering place for the town. There will be a strong effort to attract all socio-economic and ethnic groups present in the Wyomissing to downtown. Downtown Wyomissing is one of three places with urban character in the Penn Corridor JMA. However, it has a relatively lower density today, but could and should have significantly higher density in the future through redevelopment of existing parking lots. The density of downtown Wyomissing is in the range of 1.0 net FAR today, and will likely see development in the range of 3.0 to 4.0 FAR in the future.

Downtown Values: The repositioning of the outlet mall and the redevelopment of the parking lots are required to respond to current and future market demand for walkable places; especially for the current residents of Wyomissing who may want the ability to stay in the community, yet not continue to own a large single-family home or who live part of the year in another community. The redevelopment is partially meant to encourage current residents to stay in Wyomissing if they want a different way of living.

Market Rate Attached Housing: Encourage the development of market rate, high density housing, especially on the existing parking lots.

Regional and Locally-Oriented Retail: The regional retail focus should be restaurants (both white tablecloth and ethnic) and specialty boutiques. Recruitment should be focused on national, regional and locally owned restaurateurs and retailers, broadening the appeal of the existing outlet mall.

Cultural/Sports: Actively participate in Penn Corridor JMA events (festivals, parades, etc.) as well as continue to sponsor unique Wyomissing community events.

Water, Sewer and Electric: Participate in the Penn Corridor JMA lighting, sound and signage upgrade programs.

Transportation System to Downtown: Working with the Penn Corridor JMA, examine the options for providing bus and/or rail (trolley) connections along the three miles of the Corridor. In addition, encourage the commuter rail conversion that will result in a station on the Penn Corridor at the original train station and another in Wyomissing. Design these transit systems and their stations to maximize the redevelopment potential. Examine means by which the Penn Corridor can be more pedestrian friendly.

Security/Cleanliness: Work with the Penn Corridor JMA to continue Wyomissing’s efforts to increase cleanliness and safety (real and perceived).
Parking: Since much of the new development will take place on existing surface parking lots, the Borough of Wyomissing may have to participate in building parking decks for existing retail. In addition, encourage a communication system to assist visitors in finding the available parking and consider an overall management system to improve the effectiveness of existing parking assets. Downtown Wyomissing will be part of a potential corridor parking management system managed by the Penn Corridor JMA.

Building Regulatory Reforms: Develop and implement an overlay, form-based code for downtown that will replace existing zoning. This will “make the right things easy.”

Community Involvement/Residents: Coordinate with the Penn Corridor JMA to develop a comprehensive outreach strategy, including newspaper inserts/questionnaires, neighborhood meetings, a speaker’s bureau, etc., to convey the strategic plan and obtain feedback to modify over time.

Community Involvement/Non-Profit Implementation Organizations: Through legislation, empower the Penn Corridor JMA to both coordinate the management of the Penn Corridor and be the “keeper of the flame” for the downtown Wyomissing strategy. The individual or company who will be the leader of this organization will not do everything that is part of the strategy, but will ensure that all aspects of the strategy are being done and, if necessary, find alternative methods of implementing the strategy if adjustments are required.

Investor/Financial Institution Marketing: Work with the Penn Corridor JMA to create a revolving equity investment fund to encourage redevelopment projects in downtown.

Metropolitan Area Marketing: Work with the Penn Corridor JMA to create a marketing plan for the Penn Corridor in general, and Wyomissing in particular, for the residents of the town, region and eventually outside of the region.