

# KEYSTONE COMMUNITY DESIGNATION APPLICATION

Submitted to



March 2013



March 1, 2013

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C. Alan Walker, Secretary  
Department of Community and Economic Development  
Commonwealth Keystone Building  
400 North Street, 4th Floor  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0225

Dear Secretary Walker:

Enclosed is an application for Keystone Community designation for downtown Reading. The application identifies a focus area of the already existing Downtown Improvement District which will serve as a Main Street emphasis.

This application is the culmination of eight months of work by dedicated group representing a coalition of the following: the City of Reading, Reading Downtown Improvement District Authority (RDIDA), Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Berks County Latino Chamber of Commerce, Penn Corridor Initiative, Greater Reading Economic Partnership and others.

The effort has been supported and enhanced by the technical assistance of the Pennsylvania Downtown Center.

The Keystone Community program will be under the administrative and fiduciary oversight of the Downtown Improvement District Authority and managed by the RDIDA executive director.

We believe we have produced a comprehensive and coherent application for your consideration. We look forward to your timely review and approval of the designation.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Charles R. Broad".

Charles R. Broad, MBA  
Executive Director

enc.

February 27, 2013

C. Alan Walker, Secretary  
Department of Community and Economic Development  
Commonwealth Keystone Building  
400 North Street, 4th Floor  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0225

Dear Secretary Walker:

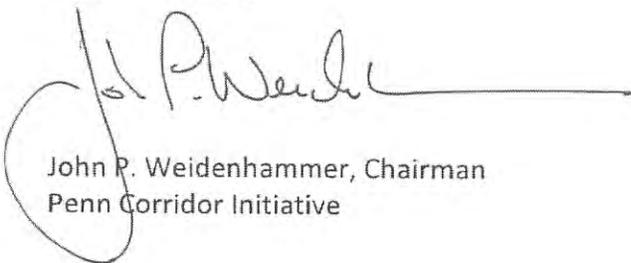
The Penn Corridor Initiative (PCI) is a program of RiverPlace Development Corporation focused on promoting the corridor along Penn Street in the City of Reading and Penn Avenue in the Boroughs of West Reading and Wyomissing.

The City of Reading has the largest portion of that corridor. Reading's section has rich architecture and is going through many challenges as it tries to revitalize. Penn Corridor Initiative has been a financial and program supporter of these efforts, especially through the Reading Downtown Improvement District. This downtown revitalization is happening in cooperation and coordination with the Penn Corridor to strengthen the region, as well as the city.

The Reading Downtown Improvement District is seeking designation as a Keystone Community with a Main Street emphasis from DCED to enhance their revitalization efforts. The board of Directors of RiverPlace Development Corporation / PCI unanimously voted to endorse the Downtown Improvement District's application.

As PCI chairman, I write to express our support of the application and to encourage you to act favorably on it as quickly as possible.

Very truly yours,



John P. Weidenhammer, Chairman  
Penn Corridor Initiative

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## **Section 1:**

### **Identification of Community**

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### A.3.a Identification of Community

#### **Regional Context**

The city of Reading, located in southeastern Pennsylvania, is the principal city of the Greater Reading Area and the seat for Berks County. Berks County has a population of 411,422 according to 2010 census data. With a population of 88,082 as of the 2010 census, Reading is the fifth most populated city in the state, after Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Allentown and Erie, and the sixth most-populous municipality. Reading is within the Philadelphia major trade area, and our basic trade area is #370: Reading.

Reading, Pennsylvania can best be described as a community at a crossroads. For much of its proud 263-year history, Reading led the rise of America's industrial might through times of both adversity and prosperity. Once home to the Reading Railroad conglomerate, our city was long recognized as a world leader in manufacturing and industry.

Those days are now gone. With the release of 2010 census data and a subsequent article about the City's economic condition published in the New York Times on September 25, 2011, Reading has quickly become known as one of the nation's poorest cities. Reading had gone from number 32 on the list of cities with the most residents living in poverty to number one in just one decade. The City climbed up to become the city with the 6<sup>th</sup> highest poverty rate for cities with a population of over 65,000 by the time 2011 census data was released, but Reading still has a long way to go in order to become the great city it once was. Shrinking tax revenues and a rising demand for human services have created an unprecedented need for a viable long-term strategy to reinvent the community.

Despite the city's challenges, Reading has a wealth of assets including two colleges and a university, Keystone Opportunity Zone designation, and containing two regional healthcare centers, a multitude of tourism venues and attractions, and a position as the seat of Berks County. Additionally, Reading is poised for growth in economic and community development through its concentration on bringing businesses back to the City and through its implementation of new high-impact projects and plans.

Perhaps more importantly, throughout times of hardship and success Reading has maintained a diverse and industrious citizenry. These citizens and other stakeholders continue to seek opportunities to contribute to the growth of the city and the Greater Reading area, and in recent years, the revitalization of Reading's commercial corridor has been identified as the key to changing the trajectory of our city.

#### **Substantive Assets**

As the County seat, the development of Reading has a major impact on the successful development of the surrounding townships and boroughs. Luckily, Reading already contributes to the development of Berks County and the regional economy as home to many major institutional, economic, and developmental assets.

### **Colleges and Universities**

Like the academic institutions located in cities throughout the United States, the colleges and the university located within Reading have a substantial impact on the region. Albright College, Reading Area Community College (RACC), and Alvernia University are all located within the City's limits. Each offers a variety of degrees, programs, and certifications and has been contributing to the regional economy for several years.

#### *Albright College*

Albright College was founded in 1856 as a private, co-educational institution. Situated in the heart of Northeast Reading, it has a nationally-ranked, four-year liberal arts program and offers Bachelor of Arts and Science degrees as well as a Master's in Education degree. Albright's 118-acre campus accommodates 1,600 day students and 110 full-time faculty. Academic programs range from fashion to legal studies and environmental science. The college also offers career development, study abroad programs, research opportunities with faculty, and service learning courses.

#### *Reading Area Community College (RACC)*

Founded in 1971, Reading Area Community College (RACC) is an accredited, comprehensive, open-enrollment education institution that provides the following: associate degrees, certificate and diploma programs; career-focused training; transitional coursework; skills training for business and industry; personal enrichment programs and public service activities.

The college provides essential affordable access to meet identified community educational needs. Students from every age, race, religion and many different countries throughout the world choose to study here. Those who are seeking degrees at the college are attracted to programs like nursing, respiratory care, criminal justice and business. Other students pursue individual courses to brush up on a skill or interest, or pursue certification in a variety of subjects. The Community Education/Workforce Development division offers programs like dental assisting, home health aide, veterinary assisting, fire and EMS training and GED preparation.

The college plays an important role in the business community as well. The new Schmidt Training and Technology Center provides training in senior leadership, manufacturing technology, information technology, workplace readiness and workplace literacy. RACC also partners with community organizations to enhance the economic vitality of the city and county.

## *Alvernia University*

Alvernia College was founded in 1958. It celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008 by being awarded University status. The university is situated in the Southwest corridor of the City about three miles from downtown. Approximately 3,000 students attend Alvernia, including 1,500 traditional undergraduates.

Alvernia's Franciscan heritage includes a rigorous intellectual tradition that recognizes and values the importance of diversity of thought, faiths and cultures. The university challenges its students to shape the world and transform it as working professionals, concerned citizens and caring community members, consistent with the principles and teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Alvernia offers an Associate of Science, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Social Work, Master of Arts in Community Counseling, Master of Arts in Liberal Studies, Master of Business Administration, Master of Education, Master of Science in Nursing, Master of Science in Occupational Therapy, and Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership.

It has accreditations from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, American Council of Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE), Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP), Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), PA State Board of Nursing Approval, PA Department of Education (PDE), Competency and Credentialing Institute.

### **KIZ, KEZ, KOZ and Other State Designated Zones**

The City of Reading received KOZ designation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development, and has recently been approved for an extension of KOEZ exemption benefits that extend until December 31, 2022.

### **Regional Healthcare Centers**

#### *The Reading Hospital and Medical Center/ Reading Hospital Medical Group*

The Reading Hospital and Medical Center is the flagship hospital for The Reading Hospital system. This not-for-profit system provides comprehensive acute care, post-acute rehabilitation, behavioral, and occupational health services to the people of Berks and adjoining counties.

Established as The Reading Dispensary in 1867, the Hospital has since expanded into a leader in tertiary care for this region of Pennsylvania.

Outpatient services of The Reading Hospital and Medical Center are extended through facilities located throughout the community, including 16 laboratory and 15 imaging centers, The Reading Health Dispensary at Second Street for primary and obstetrical care, Occupational Health Services in Muhlenberg Township, physician's office complexes in West Reading, Exeter Township, and Spring Ridge. The latter campus also features a surgicenter, weight management center, and hyperbaric and wound care programs.

The Reading Hospital Medical Group is a network of more than 100 physicians and other healthcare providers delivering primary care services to the community. Specialists in Internal Medicine, Family Medicine, Sports Medicine, Geriatric Medicine, Gynecology and Obstetrics, and Pediatrics are committed to providing our community with the best medical care available from board certified and fellowship-trained physicians.

Recognizing a growing need for accessible health care, the Medical Group has physician offices located throughout Berks County and the surrounding areas with convenient locations in downtown Reading. In addition to primary care, Reading Professional Services (RPS) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of The Reading Hospital Medical Group. RPS is comprised of over 100 physicians with expertise in various subspecialties and surgical areas of medicine.

The Reading Hospital Medical Group is a non-profit affiliate of The Reading Hospital, governed by its own Board of Directors.

#### *St. Joseph's Medical Center/ Catholic Health Initiatives*

St. Joseph Medical Center is a tax-exempt hospital with nearly 1500 employees and is the 8th largest employer in Berks County. Founded in 1873 by the Sisters of St. Francis, the medical center provides a full-range of outpatient and inpatient diagnostic, medical and surgical services to Berks County's nearly 405,000 residents.

The medical center also is widely recognized for its innovations in cardiology, pulmonary, vascular, oncology, orthopedic, wound care and women's services. St. Joseph Medical Center is affiliated with Catholic Health Initiatives, a tax-exempt corporation based in Denver, Colorado.

The St. Joseph Medical Center has multiple locations in Reading, and has benefitted the community in several ways. In addition to providing charity care for low-income individuals, St. Joseph's implements community building activities, community health improvement services, education for health professionals, and a number of in-kind services and donations.

In addition to these more traditional healthcare services, St. Joseph's has begun to invest in the Reading Community through a program called the Reading Youth Violence Prevention (RYVP) initiative. Through this project, organizations from throughout Berks County have been brought

together by a grant from St. Joseph's parent organization, Catholic Health Initiatives, to begin mapping out a plan to reduce youth violence in the community.

The planning grant has been used to assess local efforts and to determine whether and how additional efforts and resources might offer our community an opportunity to enhance and expand the impact on reducing youth violence. From there, it was determined that a number of programs and policy changes could be implemented in order to reduce violence among youth in Reading. Additional funding was provided by Catholic Health Initiatives in order to fund a mini-grant program aimed at supporting organizations implementing programs and policies/practices that will directly reduce youth violence.

#### *Berks Community Health Center*

Located in the heart of downtown Reading at 838 Penn Street, the Berks Community Health Center is a federally qualified health center that exists to meet the needs of individuals and families. It received its status as a federally qualified center on June 20, 2012.

The Reading-based center is one of only 219 organizations across the nation that received grant awards in 2012 and one of five in Pennsylvania. Berks Community Health Center is the only federally qualified health center in Berks County.

The center qualifies for an annual \$650,000 grant and immediate federal status, two key ingredients that will help it quickly offer greater access to primary and preventive health care. The center offers a sliding scale fee structure, based on federal poverty guidelines, making primary healthcare affordable to all.

It is run by a nonprofit board comprised of community members and center patients.

#### **Tourism and Venues**

The Greater Reading Convention and Visitor's Bureau serves as the entity that guides and refers travelers to the specific destinations and information they are seeking about Reading and its surrounding community, whether it is accommodations, museums, attractions, tours, sports and recreation, shopping, meetings & conventions or group tours.

Reading is home to several venues that attract people throughout the region. Altogether these venues have contributed substantially to the regional economy.

#### *Greater Reading Expo Center*

One of the Largest Regional Exhibition Centers on the East Coast, the new Greater Reading Expo Center offers 250,000 square feet of exhibition space on one floor. Located in Northeast Reading, the Expo Center provides access to more than 500,000 people, including neighboring Lehigh, Montgomery, and Bucks County residents.

A strong regional highway network including the Pennsylvania Turnpike, 1-78, Route 422 and Route 222 supplies direct access to most of the major markets along the Mid-Atlantic Corridor.

More than 3,000 free, on-site parking spaces are available for the convenience of visitors and guests. The Expo Center can accommodate any size seminar or conference with more than 30 interior rooms. The dining hall provides a stunning view of the gorgeous surrounding countryside. Six loading docks and drive-in access help make this an easy facility to move in and out of.

### *Sovereign Center/Arena*

The Sovereign Center is the premier venue in Reading, Pennsylvania to see the hottest traveling performers and shows. The Sovereign Center is a multi-purpose arena that has a seating capacity of 7,083. The Sovereign Center box office is located at 700 Penn Street in downtown Reading. Sovereign Center tickets have included a 4-show stay by Pearl Jam for the 2004 vote for change tour, WWE events, and the traveling Professional Bull Riders series. The arena is home to the Reading Royals of the ECHL and the Reading Express of the IFL.

### *Sovereign Performing Arts Center*

The Sovereign Performing Arts Center touts historic significance as well as current regional importance. Built in the 1870s as a market, with a Masonic Temple on its upper floors, it became the Academy of Music in 1886. The Rajah Shriners purchased it in 1917 to use the building for various activities including vaudeville, motion pictures, and live appearances. The auditorium was rebuilt in 1921 after a fire destroyed most of the facility. It is now a venue for quality symphonic, opera, ballet, popular music, and theatrical performances.

In June of 2000, the Berks County Convention Center Authority purchased the Rajah Theater from the Shriners. The building was renovated and renamed the Sovereign Performing Arts Center. The \$7 million renovations included a new air conditioning system, seating that is more comfortable, better stage equipment, improved dressing rooms, and more. These improvements, along with the building being managed by SMG, ensure that this historical center for performing arts will be preserved for years to come.

Today, the Sovereign Performing Arts Center is home to the Reading Symphony Orchestra and the Broadway on 6th Street series. It has also hosted numerous events. Willie Nelson, Hillary

Duff, Jerry Seinfeld, David Copperfield, and Sesame Street Live are just a few of the shows that have been seen at the theater.

### *First Energy (Reading Phillies Baseball) Stadium*

FirstEnergy Stadium is a 9,000-seat baseball-only stadium in Northwest Reading that hosted its first regular season baseball game in 1951. The park is home to the Reading Phillies of the Eastern League. It was voted the second best place to see a baseball game by Minor League News in 2006.

It is also the first ballpark to ever receive the annual Digital Ballparks.com Ballpark Of The Year Award, which it was awarded in 2002. It is the first American baseball stadium to reach a total attendance of ten million without ever serving a team higher than AA.

### *GoggleWorks Center for the Arts*

In 2005, City and community leadership seized an opportunity to make a targeted economic investment in the arts when one of downtown's last large manufacturing facilities closed its doors. Through a combination of grants, loans, and private investment, a former safety-goggle factory building was reborn as the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts.

The GoggleWorks is the largest most interactive Arts Center of its kind in the United States. The mission of the GoggleWorks is to nurture the arts, foster creativity, promote education, and enrich the community.

In the short time since it opened, the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts has become a true anchor for the arts in the City and Greater Reading, hosting a multitude of events and arts education opportunities.

The GoggleWorks accommodates practicing artists in all types of media, dance and music studios, glass-blowing, woodworking, darkroom facilities, ceramics and jewelry studios, and public galleries. It also houses a film theater, café, gift shop, classrooms and offices for local community and nonprofit organizations.

In an effort to fulfill its mission, the GoggleWorks also offers scholarship opportunities to area youth who would like to take classes there.

### *Miller Center for the Arts*

The Miller Center for the Arts, located on the campus of Reading Area Community College, has become an anchor in the city of Reading's cultural landscape. Our 509-seat theatre offers quality programming for all ages and interests. Whether you would like to see modern dance, improv comedy or a children's show, the Miller Center has something for everyone.

Some of the more prominent acts that have appeared at the Miller Center include New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players, Phildanco and the Flying Karamazov Brothers.

Along with performances, the Miller Center also hosts community events and is available for rental.

### *The Performing Arts Alliance of Greater Reading (PAAGR)*

The Reading-based community theatre groups have an extensive longevity in performance-based arts. The combined theatre companies can describe themselves as a collective of performing artists and administrators who value teaching, collaboration and diversity in their local community.

Reading Community Players was established in 1920. Their mission or objective was "to stage and produce plays of such nature that would not be given by commercial theater". This theater is very diverse in performing one-act plays to full length plays.

Reading Civic Theatre, as it is known today, started in 1894 as the Reading Civic Opera and in 1952 performed their first Broadway musical. In the past, performances have been twice a year and held at the Sovereign Performing Arts Center, a shared facility with the Reading Symphony Orchestra.

Genesis Theatre, aptly named after Saint Genesius, Patron Saint of Actors, is considered by many to be the more avant-garde theater of the three community groups. Founded in 1971 by Jane Simmon Miller and Michael O'Flaherty, the theater's core belief is the best theatre is an experience of living and feeling, changing and growing, challenging and becoming.

Theatre in Greater Reading is provocative, diverse, exciting and entertaining. However, like theatre in many regions of the country, it suffers from a dearth of resources – volunteers, performance space and funding. This reality has posed challenges for the three Reading-based theatres in the past five years. Today, each strives to be stronger and more vibrant, for the sake of the quality of theatre in our community. Now more than ever, the three groups are committed to finding ways to support each other, share resources and grow.

To assist with this process, the Performing Arts Alliance of Greater Reading (PAAGR) was formed in 2011 by all three theatres. PAAGR adopted this mission: *to serve the needs of the Reading-based theatre groups by identifying, growing and sharing resources that each needs to*

*be successful. Specifically, they strive to build, acquire and cultivate an ideal venue for performing, rehearsing, and operating; educate and develop actors, staff and crew; and raise the quality and enjoyment of theatre in Reading.*

The Alliance also established six goals: *1) Create an appropriate format and structure for collaboration among the three theatre groups; 2) Understand audience wants and needs; 3) Help member theatres choose a business model that ensures their artistic and financial success; 4) Build inter-organizational communication and rapport; 5) Identify, develop and share the resources that each group needs in order to be successful; and, 6) Identify and acquire an ideal venue for performing, rehearsing, and operating.* As PAAGR works toward these goals, it is pertinent that the theatres begin to reach a broader segment of our community. For this purpose, the city is submitting an application for funding from the NEA's Art Works program for administrative support in developing marketing strategies and programs that will allow each theatre to reach audiences that better reflect the diversity of Greater Reading.

#### *Reading Public Museum*

The mission of the Reading Public Museum, a dynamic center of lifelong learning and discovery, is to educate, enlighten and engage current and future generations through the collection, preservation and interpretation of objects of art, science and civilization.

The museum's permanent art, civilizations, and natural history and science collections as well as its traveling exhibitions attract thousands of visitors year-round. The Naeg Planetarium is adjacent to the museum, and attracts tourists, school groups, and locals alike with its wide array of star shows and music shows.

The Reading Public Museum and its vicinity has also become a beloved place for events. It hosts weddings, parties, and other events in its gallery spaces, the planetarium and on the grounds of its arboretum.

#### *Central Pennsylvania African-American Museum*

The mission of the Central Pennsylvania African-American Museum (CPAAM) is to establish, preserve, and maintain a collection of objects, artifacts, arts, papers, books, photographs, etc. that document and describe the history and culture of African-Americans in the New World, with an emphasis on our local and regional (Reading and its surrounding areas) African-American history and culture, and to create an appropriate environment for exhibition of the collection, to foster understanding of the history and culture of Africans in the New World, and to encourage education and research. The mission of the museum also includes the preservation of the

Underground Railroad located on the lower level of the Old Bethel A.M.E. Church located near 10<sup>th</sup> & Walnut Sts. in Reading.

### *Entertainment Square*

Entertainment Square is comprised of the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts, the Reading Movies 11 and IMAX Theatre, the Miller Center for the Arts, the GoggleWorks Apartments and a parking garage along Washington and Second Streets that sits above storefront and restaurant space.

An additional apartment building connected to the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts will be under construction beginning next year. These apartments will accommodate artists seeking live/work space and an open floor plan. It is anticipated that additional retail and commercial development that complements the existing amenities in Entertainment Square will take place shortly thereafter.

Positioned directly adjacent to the City's main gateway and downtown, the area is poised to draw investment, tourism, and a great deal of economic development opportunities. It will undoubtedly become the nucleus for arts and cultural activities while contributing to the overall development of the Ricktown Arts District, the City, and Greater Reading as a whole.

### **High-Growth and High-Tech Business Concentrations**

Several previous economic development strategy efforts have suggested that Reading and Berks County target leading clusters as part of a competitive economic development approach. The concept of cluster-based economic development still makes sense, but many of the premises of past recommendations must be revisited.

Several of the past "target" clusters, such as financial services specifically tied to Wall Street, had to be re-targeted, while others, such as energy storage or diversified manufacturing, deserve greater levels of investment and support. At the same time, new types of cluster support strategies should be considered, especially in regards to strengthening our region's business retention initiatives. In the past, cluster targeting was primarily tied to external business recruitment efforts and training partnerships. In the future, other strategies, such as the strengthening of local business cluster networks and supply chain development, could also be added to the policy mix.

### *Reading Named Emerging High-Tech Epicenter*

In May, 2011, Reading was featured in Wired Magazine as one of seven emerging epicenters of high-tech industry across the nation for its job creation in the realm of electrical equipment, namely, batteries.

The following efforts have taken place over the past several years to strengthen business retention and to promote high-growth and high-tech businesses within a “cluster strategy.”

#### *Small Business Micro-loans*

In November 2010, the City of Reading launched its microloan program funded with \$540,000 of state funds. The program is designed to assist very small businesses in Reading to expand, as well as providing funds to start-up businesses that will grow their businesses in the city.

Loans are available to low and moderate-income persons wishing to start a business or businesses located in or wishing to locate in low and moderate income areas of the City.

Loans are also available to other businesses located in or wishing to locate in the City of Reading who will hire their 51% of their new workers from the low and moderate income labor pool. Under program regulations, low and moderate-income persons residing in the City are given priority.

The City’s Community Development Department oversees the program.

#### *East Penn Manufacturing*

Using a \$32.5 million grant from the US Department of Energy, East Penn Manufacturing, part of a thriving battery-tech cluster in Reading, is producing a new type of battery for hybrid electric cars.

This Australian-designed lead-acid has a carbon super-capacitor, and its 70 percent less expensive to manufacture than a conventional nickel-based cell. By 2013, East Penn expects to have increased its output by 2.8 million batteries per year.

So far the company has added 150 new manufacturing jobs. East Penn has also been selected for the last nine years as one of the "Best Places to Work in Pennsylvania" by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, Team Pennsylvania Foundation, The Central Pennsylvania Business Journal and the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business & Industry.

#### *Carpenter Technology*

With an ever-expanding location in the northwest section of Reading since 1889, Carpenter (NYSE:CRS) is a leader in the development, manufacture and distribution of cast/wrought and powder metal stainless steels and specialty alloys including high temperature (iron-nickel-cobalt base), stainless, superior corrosion resistant, controlled expansion alloys, ultra high-strength

and implantable alloys, tool and die steels, and other specialty metals as well as cast/wrought titanium alloys, and the company remains an important part of the local economy.

Product forms include loose gas atomized metallic powders, billet, hollow and multi-dimensional forged bar, cold finished bar, strip and plate, and wire and rod. Carpenter continues increasing its global manufacturing capacity and expanding operations to provide customers with single-source solutions for today's ever-changing materials challenges.

Their worldwide and local staff includes expert metallurgists, research and development scientists, engineers and service professionals.

#### *Hydrojet, Inc.*

Hydrojet Inc. is a leader in the waterjet cutting, precision machining, CNC milling, 3D Machining, and tooling design industry. With nearly two decades of experience applying waterjet cutting technologies and the highest precision machining standards, Hydrojet has the ability to provide superior quality precision machining services at the lowest possible cost. Our state of the art precision machining and waterjet cutting facility is located in the northwest section of Reading, and employs over 50 people.

#### *Quadrant Engineering Plastic Products USA, Inc.*

For more than a half-century, Quadrant Engineering Plastic Products USA Inc. and its predecessor companies going back to Polymer Corp. not only have occupied a facility at 2120 Fairmont Ave., but have grown in that location. Just recently, Quadrant completed the latest multimillion-dollar investment in the facility.

The maker of high performance thermoplastics, the project increased its extrusion capacity in 2011. It also added equipment that performs secondary processes such as annealing and finishing. Although the plant was not expanded, two areas inside were reconfigured to allow for the new equipment.

The materials that are produced are provided mainly to customers in the aerospace, semiconductor manufacturing and life-sciences/medical industries.

Quadrant employs 220 in Reading, 500 in Pennsylvania and 650 in the U.S.

#### *Brentwood Industries*

For more than 40 years, Brentwood Industries, 610 Morgantown Road, has been designing and manufacturing product solutions for highly diverse worldwide industries, including automotive, battery, construction, medical packaging, cooling systems, stormwater management and

wastewater treatment.

Brentwood is privately owned and is led by Peter Rye, president. It employs 300 people in Reading and more than 600 worldwide.

### **New Projects/Projects under Development**

#### *Entertainment Square Development*

Entertainment Square is comprised of the GoggleWorks, the Reading Movies 11 and IMAX Theatre, the Miller Center for the Arts and a parking garage along Washington and Second Streets that sits above storefront and restaurant space. The mixed use GoggleWorks Apartment building is also under construction located at this intersection.

Positioned directly adjacent to the City's main gateway and downtown, the area is poised to draw investment, tourism, and a great deal of economic development opportunities. It will undoubtedly become the nucleus for arts and cultural activities while contributing to the overall development of the Ricktown Arts District, the City, and Greater Reading.

#### *Double Tree Hotel*

The City has secured millions of dollars in Section 108 loans and RACP funds to construct a 208-room Double Tree hotel in the 700 Block of Penn Street, directly across from the County's largest entertainment venue – the Sovereign Center.

The hotel will ensure that there is enough lodging for those attracted to events such as the Jehovah's Witness Conventions, Greater Berks Jazz Fest, and the many concerts and shows that take place at the Sovereign Center and throughout Greater Reading each year.

The hotel project will also create hundreds of jobs.

#### *Artist Live/Work Space*

The nonprofit corporation, Our City Reading, has secured funding for the design and construction of 16 to 24 artist "live/work" studio apartments on the top floors of Goggle 2, a five-story unoccupied structure east of the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts.

This building is connected to the GoggleWorks at the top three floors via an enclosed walkway between the two buildings. The proposed studio apartments would be between 1,000 to 1,500 square feet in area and would be considered "loft style" apartments on the open market. The apartments are located less than one block from the proposed Main Street area.

## **Revitalization Strategies/Plans**

### *Act 47 Financial Recovery Plan*

Despite the tremendous amount of capital investment in the downtown over the last decade, the City of Reading is in a severe financial crisis. A few years ago the Mayor of Reading asked the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Secretary of the Department of Community and Economic Development to designate the City as financially distressed under Act 47. In November 2009 the Secretary approved the distress determination, saying the City's "pattern of operating deficits is unsustainable and if left unabated will force the city to significantly reduce or eliminate fundamental services that may adversely affect the health, safety, welfare, and quality of life of the citizens."

As a result, in December 2009 the Secretary appointed a coordinator led by Public Financial Management, Inc. to develop a financial Recovery Plan to bring the City back to fiscal health. Filed in the spring of 2011, the Act 47 Financial Recovery Plan outlines several changes that are needed to foster economic development and growth in the City. These include recommendations to bring short- and long-term revenues into balance, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its public services, and establish sustainable operating budgets.

Among these, and relevant to this Master Plan, is the recommendation that the City develop a local economic development partnership and comprehensive strategy that will coordinate future development activities (as many of the recent development projects listed above were not directed or coordinated by the City but rather by outside groups such as Our City Reading [OCR]). It is intended that this Master Plan will serve as a blueprint for this group as it looks to identify and prioritize specific projects that will increase the City's tax base by attracting and retaining residents and businesses within the City limits

### *Penn Corridor*

The Penn Corridor is Greater Reading's hub for arts, culture, dining and entertainment. It will reconnect residents with their urban core. The over two-mile long Penn Corridor includes Penn Street from City Park in Reading through the downtown area and across the Penn Street Bridge to Penn Avenue, extending through West Reading and Wyomissing. Just off Penn Corridor are several parks, a world-class museum and art exhibits, something for everyone.

The Penn Corridor Development Plan was commissioned by the Berks County Economic Partnership in 2005. This plan, conducted by Sasaki Architects and the Brookings Institution, developed urban design/development recommendations and marketing strategies to position the Penn Street Corridor as the main street of downtown Greater Reading (to include Reading, West Reading, and Wyomissing). It stemmed from the 2004 Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading (ICGR), which recommended that the Penn Corridor be branded as a hospitality, entertainment, and tourism corridor.

The area of Reading proposed for Main Street Designation overlaps with Penn Corridor boundaries.

### *Schuylkill River National Heritage Area*

Considered a National Heritage Area, the Schuylkill River and its banks, trails, and watersheds are within close walking distance of the proposed Main Street area. A National Heritage Area is a place designated by the United States Congress where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape. The Schuylkill River received this designation from Congress in 2000. The Schuylkill River watershed was also designated a Pennsylvania Heritage Area by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in 1995.

National and State Heritage Areas work to revitalize and restore the region through natural and cultural resource preservation, education, recreation, community revitalization, and heritage tourism. The City of Reading is included within the boundaries of both the State and the National Heritage Areas, and as such is eligible for the many state and federal grants available to communities interested in coordinating marketing, heritage tourism promotions, and historic resource protection.

### *Riverplace Master Plan*

The Riverplace Master Plan stemmed from a 2003 initiative to champion and coordinate revitalization efforts along the Schuylkill River in Berks County. In 2004 the RiverPlace Development Corporation, a newly formed non-profit corporation, together with the Schuylkill River Greenway Association (who is primarily responsible for managing the Schuylkill River State and National Heritage Area) commissioned a master plan to create a vision for riverfront redevelopment.

Conducted by Sasaki Associates in 2006 and funded in part by a grant provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the National Park Service, and the County of Berks, this plan addresses the riverfront area between the Schuylkill Avenue Bridge (on the north) and Heritage Park (on the south), extending approximately one-half mile inland on both sides of the Schuylkill River. Its recommendations include a variety of new civic

and private development initiatives within this area, including greenway trail extensions, open space and park development, and streetscape improvements.

The RiverPlace Development Corporation, whose board is comprised of local government, business and civic representatives, continues to coordinate plans for the riverfront and communicate these plans to the community at large.

The Riverplace Master Plan area also overlaps with the proposed Main Street program area.

### *Ride to Prosperity*

Ride to Prosperity is an initiative of eight leading Berks County economic development and workforce organizations who have come together to brainstorm and develop pathways to prosperity that can be put into place over the next five years. Members include: The Berks County Industrial Development Authority, the Berks County Planning Commission, the Berks County Workforce Investment Board, the Berks Economic Partnership, the City of Reading, the Greater Berks Development Fund, the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Greater Reading Convention and Visitors Bureau. Initiatives are underway in the areas of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Workforce/Talent Development, Clusters, Sites & Infrastructure, and Quality of Place.

### *Reading Area Community College (RACC) Master Plan*

The Reading Area Community College completed a Master Plan for campus expansion in 2006 that is envisioned to accommodate needed changes through the year 2016. Highlights of the plan recommend several major improvements and acquisitions, including the Fleetwood property and the Competition Tire property (south of Franklin Street), which has already been done. Based upon recent discussions with RACC administrative staff, other plan recommendations of relevance include:

- Converting the Chestnut Street Extension to extend Front Street and closing off Franklin Street to thru-traffic between Front and 2nd Streets.
- Demolishing Berks Hall and replacing it with an updated academic building.
- Extending and strengthening the central pedestrian spine that runs north-south through the center of the campus and providing traffic calming along Front Street, such as a boulevard and raised pedestrian crossings.

The area being proposed for Main Street designation begins at 2<sup>nd</sup> and Penn Streets, which is a central point of RACC's sprawling campus.

### *Ricktown Arts District Master Plan*

In recent years the arts have emerged as a potential key to revitalization in cities like Reading. In a 2010 report for the National Endowment for the Art's Mayors' Institute on City Design, Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa describe the process of "Creative Placemaking." This concept is one of the driving forces behind the Ricktown Arts District initiative.

"In creative place making, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities," according to Markusen and Gadwa (2010, p. 3).

Planners focus on making an area more physically attractive by animating public and private spaces, and rejuvenating structures and streetscapes. However, the ultimate goals of any creative placemaking plan are multi-faceted and include improving local business viability and public safety, celebrating community diversity, and promoting resident pride and ownership among other things.

The Ricktown Arts District is a creative placemaking effort focused on a 10-block area of the City of Reading. The focus area is kept to a modest size intentionally. In 2010, the City was advised by the State's Department of Commerce and Economic Development, to target investment in one compact area as part of the City's Act 47 Recovery Plan. This strategy will allow the City to show success and make a significant impact with limited resources in one particular area. The City would then use that model to develop other areas rather than stretching resources with little impact across the entire City of Reading.

The Ricktown Arts District Master Plan provides recommendations and outlines specific ways to capitalize on the neighborhood's existing arts and cultural assets, create new arts and cultural features, improve public spaces, use public resources and partnerships, attract new and retain current residents and investors, and encourage resident ownership and participation in order to spur overall community improvement. If successfully implemented, the plan will drive economic development and private investment in the neighborhood, the City, and eventually throughout Greater Reading.

### *City of Reading Market Value Analysis*

The Market Value Analysis (MVA) is a tool designed to assist the private market and government officials to identify and comprehend the various elements of local real estate markets. It is based fundamentally on local administrative data sources.

By using an MVA, public sector officials and private market actors can more precisely craft intervention strategies in weak markets and support sustainable growth in stronger market segments.

The Reinvestment Fund of Philadelphia prepared the MVA for Reading by doing the following:

1. Taking all of the data layers and geocoding to Census block groups.

2. Inspecting and validating those data layers.
3. Using a statistical cluster analysis, identify areas that share a common constellation of characteristics.
4. Mapping the result.
5. Visually inspecting areas of the City for conformity with the statistical/spatial representation.
6. Re-solving and re-inspecting until they achieve an accurate representation.

Components of the MVA include:

- Median sales price 2010-2012 (February)
- Coefficient of variance for sales price
- Subsidized rental stock as a % of all rental units
- Vacant housing units as a % of all housing units
- Foreclosure filings as a % of residential parcels
- Ratio of commercial to developed area
- Owner-occupied as a % of all housing units
- New construction as a % of residential parcels

## **Section 2:**

### **Five-Year Strategy**

- ✓ Mission Statement
- ✓ Vision Statement
- ✓ Five-Year Strategy
- ✓ Complement to Overall Strategy
- ✓ Strategy for Years 1 to 5

## Reading, PA Main Street Program

### Mission

Ensure vibrancy and economic vitality in Downtown Reading through design, promotion and revitalization to attract and retain businesses, residents and visitors to the City of Reading.

### Preamble

The City of Reading, located in southeastern Pennsylvania, has a population of 88,082 and is the principal municipality of the Greater Reading Area and the seat of Berks County. With access to major highways, downtown Reading is Greater Reading's hub for arts, dining, and entertainment with an international flair. Connect with your urban core and discover downtown Reading, a dynamic and attractive community that is the most desired location in the region for starting or relocating a business, staging and attending events, shopping, eating, strolling, and meeting.

### Tagline

Reading...All Aboard!

### Vision

**All Aboard... for Charm and Beauty:** Downtown Reading's intact collection of attractive and historically significant buildings paired with its array of businesses reflective of the City's current cultural diversity, creates a distinct neighborhood identity. With attention to design and historic preservation, downtown Reading is known for its charming architecture, decorative signs and banners, picturesque landscaping, and seasonal décor. This is achieved through design guidelines that encourage a uniform aesthetic of the downtown streetscape and recognize the history of downtown Reading while celebrating the diversity of current residents and businesses. Attention to design also promotes the development and use of green spaces, increases the reality and perception of safety, and encourages pedestrian activity.

**All Aboard... for Excitement:** Downtown is Greater Reading's hub for social gatherings, entertainment, shopping, and dining. Residents and visitors are attracted to downtown because of the energy exuding from venues that offer a variety of music, theater, dance, and other arts and cultural experiences. Visitors come early and stay late to dine on authentic multi-national cuisine ranging from mouth-watering Latin and Indian dishes to delectable regional favorites. Whether you're looking for a chance to attend the performance of a legendary jazz artist, take in the thrill of a hockey game, experience classical music through one of the nation's longest-performing symphony orchestras, attend an art gallery exhibit, shop for vintage items, or take the kids to a movie, downtown has something exciting to offer everyone! In addition to activities at major venues, recurring outdoor events such as street fairs and markets ensure that coming to downtown Reading is always an enlivening experience.

**All Aboard... for Opportunity:** Doing business downtown means success! With a central location and easy access from major highways and thoroughfares, downtown Reading is the ideal business location. Revitalization of the City's commercial core has created an environment that encourages economic development and a variety of attractive incentives make it easy for businesses to start and grow or relocate to downtown Reading. Business owners can also count on one another for cross-promotion between restaurants, entertainment venues and other establishments. As a result, downtown Reading is a center of economic activity for Greater Reading, all of the storefronts and commercial/office spaces are filled, and businesses thrive with the support of residents, visitors, workers, and students.

### Organization

This vision will be achieved through the cooperative efforts of City government, non-profit organizations, businesses, private developers, and volunteers to implement design; promotion; economic restructuring; and safe, clean & green initiatives. These efforts will be led by the Main Street program as administered by the Reading Downtown Improvement District (DID).

## Reading, PA Main Street Program Five-Year Strategy

Lead Committee		Goals for 2013
Year 1	■ <b>Organization Committee</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Secure \$2M in funding through applying for grants and soliciting aid from four local foundations. By June 1 develop a quarterly plan for continued fundraising.</li> <li>2. Prioritize projects, activities, and tasks by April 30 to develop measurable committee work plans.</li> <li>3. Develop and launch a Main Street membership incentive program with the goal of obtaining 200 new memberships by December 31.</li> </ol>
	◆ <b>Economic Restructuring</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Develop a framework to empower 325 existing businesses in target area.</li> <li>5. Take inventory of 250 buildings in the Main Street target area and develop a business database.</li> </ol>
	◆ <b>Design Committee</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Purchase and place public furniture (30 benches) and fixtures (including, but not limited to, 25 new trash cans) for Main Street area by June 1.</li> <li>7. Install way-finding (pedestrian) and directional (vehicular) signs between Penn and 2<sup>nd</sup> Streets and Penn and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets by June 1.</li> </ol>
	▲ <b>Promotion Committee</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Gather information by April 1, 2013 on all current downtown events and activities planned for 2013.</li> <li>9. Develop online and hard copy materials by May 1 to aid in cross-promotion of businesses and encourage event attendees to stay downtown beyond their planned event.</li> <li>10. Coordinate a June street fair in the Main Street target area to celebrate placement of the new directional signs, public furniture, and fixtures.</li> </ol>
	● <b>SAFE, CLEAN AND GREEN</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Conduct tree trimming and tree replacement assessment in May and October.</li> <li>12. Promote availability of DID Ambassadors to the public. Ambassadors will commit to visit each downtown business with a flyer outlining their services by June 1. Additionally, a DID representative will schedule a press release by March 31 with a renewed commitment statement to the public.</li> <li>13. Provide uniform trash receptacles (with Design Committee help) by June 1.</li> </ol>

Lead Committee		Goals for 2014
Year 2	■ <b>Organization Committee</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Secure an additional \$500K in funding, partnerships, and volunteers for second year priority projects – Specifically, apply for Public Improvement Grant and Anchor Building Grants to assist owners in achieving required design standards and façade improvements.</li> <li>2. Cultivate partnerships with 40 new businesses and recruit 50 committed volunteers through outreach and education in local schools and businesses.</li> </ol>
	◆ <b>Economic Restructuring Committee</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Design two new programs aimed at strengthening the local economic base and retaining existing businesses (through 2015). Work with the Berks Chamber of Commerce and Community First to advertise and implement programs.</li> </ol>
	◆ <b>Design Committee</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Draft Downtown Design Handbook that will publicize design standards for the Main Street area. Publish and release to public through DID by April 1.</li> </ol>
	▲ <b>Promotion Committee</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Schedule quarterly opportunities for community groups and local business and property owners to host activities that attract people to downtown or to participate in activities already happening in downtown businesses and venues.</li> <li>6. Update existing online and hard-copy materials to aid in cross-promotion of businesses, distribute new materials with maps and calendar of events by March 31.</li> </ol>

	7. Hold annual historic downtown walking tour in May.
●SAFE, CLEAN AND GREEN	8. Continue coordination of planning on light poles. Identify which lights are operating with LED bulbs. Present budget to steering committee for cost of making all lights LED. Make all lights energy efficient by September 30. 9. Conduct assessment of street lighting in target area by July 31 and make recommendation to DID of necessary additions and or repairs. 10. Complete bench restoration project by June 1.

Lead Committee		Goals for 2015
Year 3	■Organization Committee	11. Secure \$500K in funding, partnerships, and volunteers for third year priority projects.
	◆Economic Restructuring Committee	12. Design programs for business recruitment and actively recruit at least 10 new businesses for downtown, preferably with the option to use the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> floors for residential rentals (through 2015).
	◆Design Committee	13. Take inventory and evaluate all public spaces (court yards and historic landmarks) by mobilizing a volunteer committee. Purchase and install markers for historic landmarks by September 30.
	▲Promotion Committee	14. Continue to establish and promote ongoing events. 15. Review existing parking patterns and availability. Meet with Reading Parking Authority by April 30 to resolve any parking issues that result from the assessment. 16. Hold annual historic walking tour in May.
	●SAFE, CLEAN AND GREEN	17. Beautify entrance to the City from Penn Street Bridge (with Design Committee help). Decided on project scope and cost by March 1 and implement by June 1. 18. Centralize placement of handbills and 12 advertising kiosks by April 30.

Lead Committee		Goals for 2016
Year 4	■Organization Committee	1. Secure \$200K in funding, partnerships, and volunteers for fourth year priority projects.
	◆Economic Restructuring Committee	2. Increase technical assistance for new business owners about local funding and provide appropriate financing education. Hold at least two workshops, one in March and one in September aimed at business recruitment.
	◆Design Committee	3. Establish a (design) vision for Penn Square (400 & 500 blocks of Penn St) using the prior studies completed of this area. 4. Begin implementing façade improvements.
	▲Promotion Committee	5. Develop a coupon program for all downtown businesses, with the goal of obtaining membership from 50 businesses. 6. Hold annual historic walking tour in May. 7. Continue to establish and promote ongoing events.
	●SAFE, CLEAN AND GREEN	8. Work with BARTA to have bus stops renovated. 9. Work with the Reading Parking Authority to upgrade the appearance of City garages.

Lead Committee		Goals for 2017
Year 5	 <b>Organization Committee</b>	10. Secure \$200K in funding, partnerships, and volunteers for fourth year priority projects. 11. Create Main Street Sustainability Plan for years 6-10.
	 <b>Economic Restructuring</b>	12. Create a strategy to effectively monitor the economic performance of the 50 most prominent businesses in the Commercial Core district.
	 <b>Design Committee</b>	13. Review traffic patterns by assessing 12 volunteers to document traffic flow and count over three days during rush hour times as well as mid-afternoon and early evening times. Present recommendations to Planning Commission by September 1.
	 <b>Promotion Committee</b>	14. Hold annual historic walking tour in May. 15. Continue to establish and promote ongoing events.
	 <b>SAFE, CLEAN AND GREEN</b>	16. Continue street lighting improvements throughout Main Street area including a focus on sign lighting for a minimum of thirty Main St. businesses.

### Main Street Initiatives in Relation to City of Reading and County of Berks Comprehensive Plans

In 1998 the City of Reading held a public outreach phase that consisted of 29 neighborhood meetings and various public questionnaires. This resulted in developing the current **City of Reading Comprehensive Plan**, which, through the following policies, addresses solutions for the issues surrounding commercial uses of Main Street:

**ISSUE:** Downtown Reading remains an activity center in the City, but has lost much of its former vibrancy and no longer functions as the center of the region.

#### POLICIES:

- 3.1 Develop concepts and strategies for the downtown based on recent development and previously endorsed plans,
- 3.2 Evaluate the influence of the Sovereign Center to guide potential strategies for nearby underutilized or vacant properties.
- 3.3 Create innovative programs for attracting new commercial and residential uses that are appropriate to the character of individual activity areas.
- 3.4 Assist business and property owners in the co-ordination of special events, business hours, property lighting, signage and reinvestment.
- 3.5 Develop a unified strategy for marketing the downtown.
- 3.6 Promote first floor activities that are interactive with pedestrians in commercial areas of downtown.
- 3.7 Encourage residential re-use of upper floors of buildings in the downtown

to increase vitality of City and to augment property values<sup>1</sup>

**ISSUE:** To enhance the general welfare and safety of pedestrians through physical improvements and new programs that preserve the character of neighborhoods.

**POLICIES:**

2.1 Assess pedestrian street lighting needs citywide that would improve the sense of security.

2.2 Evaluate circulation patterns in areas of heavy pedestrian traffic to improve safety and convenience throughout the day.

2.3 Explore options for improving pedestrian safety at the Lancaster Avenue/Morgantown Road/West Shore Bypass intersection.<sup>2</sup>

**ISSUE:** To improve traffic flow and safety through infrastructure enhancements that reduce congestion, improve air quality and will increase the City's appeal as a place to live, work and visit.

**POLICIES:**

3.1 Standardize street, directional and attraction signage with assistance from Berks County and the State.

3.2 Synchronize signals to improve traffic flow downtown and on major arterial streets.<sup>3</sup>

**The Main Street 5-year plan submitted in our application presents measured goals and outputs for 80% of these policy points. Therefore, we hold that it successfully aligns with the City's Comprehensive Plan.**

The **Berks County Comprehensive Plan** does not address many issues pertinent to the Main Street focus area, and therefore is largely irrelevant for the purpose of our goals in this application. However, it does suggest plans for the following, which can be incorporated into the larger goals of Main Street:

- US 422 / Penn Street Interchange – reconstruction of substandard interchange to eliminate congestion and provide safe, efficient access to the heart of the Reading urban area.<sup>4</sup>
- Ongoing use of Geographic Implementation Systems (GIS) to provide data layers for transportation and land use as well as tax parcel ID numbers<sup>5</sup>

The County also offers all municipalities the opportunity to apply for the Existing Developed Areas Program (EDAP). Funding under this program is used for Long Term Financial Analysis and Forecasts and Site Specific Redevelopment Concept Plans.

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<sup>1</sup> 2000 *City of Reading Comprehensive Plan*, Chapter 1: Land Use Issues and Policies, pg. 28

<sup>2</sup> 2000 *City of Reading Comprehensive Plan*, Chapter 3: Transportation, pg. 39

<sup>3</sup> 2000 *City of Reading Comprehensive Plan*, Chapter 3: Transportation, pg. 40

<sup>4</sup> *County of Berks Comprehensive Plan*, Section 3, Highways, III-15

<sup>5</sup> *County of Berks Comprehensive Plan*, Section 3, Programs, Future, III-25

Wherein the Berks County Comprehensive Plan addresses problems relating to Main Street, City of Reading (as listed above), we find that the 5-year plan is adequate to address them and therefore aligns with the greater goals of Berks County.