



# SET INTO MOTION

## THE PLAN OF THE LOWER SAUCON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE

SET INTO MOTION is the recommendation of the Lower Saucon Township Economic Development Task Force. Implementation of the recommended plan will propel Lower Saucon into the economic boom occurring in the Lehigh Valley, setting the Township into motion to create an even better place to live, work, and play.

**Boucher & James, Inc.**  
**October 15, 2014**

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## THE PLAN OF THE LOWER SAUCON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE

October 2014

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lower Saucon is at a pivotal point in its history. The Lehigh Valley area is booming with new commercial and industrial development, entertainment venues, innovative health care, and educational opportunities. Located in the heart of the “Valley”, Lower Saucon is poised to make changes to its existing climate to attract development and actively participate in the synergy. The Township Council approved the creation of an Economic Development



Task Force to study the existing economic conditions and develop a plan for future economic development within the Township.

The Economic Development Task Force is comprised of business owners and residents in the Township as well as representatives from Lehigh University and the Chamber of Commerce. This diverse group went through a series of steps to develop the plan as it is presented herein. The process began with a study of the existing zoning and other planning documents. A Land Use Inventory and Analysis was completed for the commercial and industrial zoned areas of the Township, primarily the 412 / Leithsville Road Corridor, the Route 378 corridor, the village area along Old Philadelphia Pike, the Lehigh University area, and the Applebutter Road corridor.

After a bus tour of the Township and a fresh understanding of the Township’s development patterns, challenges, and opportunities, the group developed their vision statement:

*Lower Saucon Township will support existing businesses and institutions while developing future opportunities through managed growth that reflects the Township’s heritage.*

The Task Force analyzed and reviewed the demographic data as well as significant regional projects and developed the goals which provide the foundation for this Plan:

- Promote Economic Development Growth
- Explore Potential Uses / Adaptive Reuse for Existing Underutilized Parcels within the Township
- Promote and Encourage the Creation of New Ventures that Attract High-Wage, Future-Oriented Businesses
- Maintain and Enhance the Quality of Life in Lower Saucon Township.

While the goals are very broad-based statements they are attainable with the associated objectives and tasks in the Action Plan. The Action Plan tasks are assigned responsible parties and time frames. Responsible parties are Township and community entities, such as Township Council, Chamber of Commerce, Township Planner and Engineer, Planning Commission, etc. Time Frames are considered On-Going,

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Short-Term (within a one year period), Mid-Term (within 2 to 5 years) and Long-Term (within 5 to 10 years). The Short-Term tasks are further given timelines to ensure each of the tasks are accomplished.

The action items and tasks in the Action Plan are all directly related to the four main goals and many tend to overlap slightly which reinforces the importance of these tasks. One such example is the review of Township ordinances, policies, and permitting processes. Because this one task is related to all four goals, the report prioritizes these actions. Also, low cost and easily accomplished tasks tend to have a higher priority with an anticipated quick delivery and impact.

The Action Plan Short-Term Tasks include items such as:

- Creation of a committee to work with Township staff in reviewing Township policies and permitting procedures
- Re-examine zoning districts, permitted uses, and area and dimensional requirements
- Parcel inventory to determine highest and best uses as well as maximum development potential
- Use utility base mapping to determine areas with public sewer and water that are best suitable for development
- Explore the need and feasibility of tax incentives and grant monies to attract and retain small research and development companies
- Establish contact in facilities planning at major regional employers

- Explore space in/on Township owned properties for appropriateness and adaptability as office and research space.
- Undertake a major branding and marketing campaign to launch the economic development goals and objectives of this report

With the creation and adoption of this Plan, the Township is well on its way to making a positive impact on the economic climate of the community. The Task Force has already taken a step through an official motion to recommend approval of the Applebutter Road Zoning Amendment. Active Task Force members, staff, and other community leaders will be the driving force to see that the steps and tasks in this Plan are implemented to the benefit of the Township and to the economic future of Lower Saucon.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### Overview of Lower Saucon Township

Lower Saucon Township is located in the heart of the Lehigh Valley. Named after the Lehigh River, the “Valley” contains the cities of Easton, Bethlehem, and Allentown and is generally considered to be the counties of Northampton and Lehigh. Lehigh Valley is the fastest growing and third most populous region in the state of Pennsylvania. It is quickly gaining recognition as one of the leading areas for health-related, industrial, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) related businesses.



Lower Saucon Township is 24.3 square miles in size and is located in the southern portion of Northampton County. It borders the City of Bethlehem, Bethlehem Township and



Hellertown Borough to the north, Williams Township to the east, Bucks County to the south, and Lehigh County (Upper Saucon) to the west. The Township’s location has created varying development patterns but yet provides unique opportunities for the future.

Lower Saucon was founded in the mid 1700’s by early English and German settlers who came to the area for its abundance of

fertile lands and plentiful water. Development in the Township had historically been rural with small village development, such as Bingen, Leithsville, Polk Valley, Redington, Seidersville, and Wassergass. The area that is now Hellertown Borough was a portion of Lower Saucon until 1872.



Today, Lower Saucon remains a primarily rural and agricultural community with a population just less than 11,000 people. Residential homes dot the rolling landscape. Commercial development is focused along the Route 412 and Route 378 corridors. Industrial development is located near and along Applebutter Road. The proximity to Lehigh University and other Lehigh Valley destinations are key to the future economic development of the Township.

Municipal services and amenities, like public water and sewer, a 24-hour police department, eight Township parks, two



historical groups, and many others provide Lower Saucon Township with a foundation for business and residential recruitment. Township leadership and staff are committed to making Lower Saucon a great place to live, work, and play.

### Economic Development Task Force

In October of 2013, the Township Council voted to establish an Economic Development Task Force in 2014. The Township staff and Council worked closely together to form the framework for the committee and utilized the Township Planner, Boucher & James, Inc. to develop a timeframe and scope of work for the Task Force. A mix of citizens, business owners, and representatives from Lehigh University and the Chamber of Commerce were invited to join the committee and tentative dates for meetings were set.

The Lower Saucon Township Economic Development Task Force had its first meeting on Wednesday, January 29, 2014. Overall goals developed by the Township staff and Council were discussed and what the role of the Task Force would be. The framework and timelines were discussed and the Task Force reviewed existing planning data such as the current zoning, Joint comprehensive Plan and the County Comprehensive Plan. The Task Force also examined the Land Use Inventory and Analysis, which is included as a portion of this report.

On March 1, 2014 the Task Force embarked on a bus tour of the Township and surrounding areas to see parcels, projects, and businesses that may have an economic potential or current influence on the Township.

The Task Force met monthly starting in March for brainstorming and discussion. The Task Force answered questions that helped them formulate a visioning statement as a basis for all their future discussions. The group's biggest task,

however, was the development of goals and objectives related to their vision statement. They had many ideas and narrowed down their thoughts to four primary goals.

A number of objectives were developed for each of the goals, which provide the heart of the Action Plan. The objectives, such as, "Remove roadblocks for development and redevelopment of vacant parcels" and "Partner with existing institutions" are examples of real, tangible aspirations for the Task Force and the Township.

Representatives from major Economic Development entities in the Lehigh Valley met with the Task Force in June 2014. This included Don Cunningham from the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC), Diane Donaher, from the Northampton County Department of Community and Economic Development, and Stephanie Weitzman of the Hellertown / Lower Saucon Chamber of Commerce, representing the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce.

At the July meeting of the Task Force, discussions on the current status of economics in the Township revolved around the status of the Applebutter Road zoning amendment. The Task Force felt that the amendment is warranted and would support the objectives the Committee had developed thus far. The Task Force approved a motion by a vote of 12-0, that read "The Lower Saucon Economic Development Task Force recommends approval of the Applebutter Road Zoning Amendment"

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The last task of the Economic Development Task Force prior to the approval and recommendation of this report was the development of the Action Plan – the key piece of information contained herein. The Action Plan sets up specific tasks, such as “Include existing regional facilities, such as the Lehigh River and the Saucon Rail Trail, in the advertising pieces aimed at relocating or new businesses” and “Use utility base mapping to determine areas with public water and sewer that are best suitable for development.” Each of these very specific

tasks has been assigned a responsible party (such as Township Council, Planning Commission, Chamber of Commerce, etc.), and a timeframe for each action to be completed (Ongoing, Short-term, Mid-term, Long-term).

The Task Force will present the research and findings of this report to the Township Council. This report than can be another tool for the Township to utilize in its quest for successful economic development.

## II. PLAN DEVELOPMENT

### Data Collection

The review and analysis of existing data was a basic but important step in the planning process. The Township's Planning Consultant, Boucher & James, Inc., was charged with the task of data collection and presentation to the Task Force. The task force spent multiple meetings reviewing the information and incorporating it into their discussions. A full copy of all the data presented to the Task Force can be found in Appendix A of this report.

### *Zoning and Land Use Inventory and Analysis*



A review of current zoning, led the Task Force and consultant to focus its Land Use Analysis and Inventory on the following commercial and industrial zoning districts within the Township:

- VC, Village Center
- GB1, General Business 1
- GB2, General Business 2
- OL, Office / Laboratory
- LM, Light Manufacturing
- LI, Light Industrial

The development patterns in the Township generally follow the zoning boundaries. Therefore, the Land Use Inventory and Analysis was broken in to four study areas. Section A consisted of the GB1 and GB2 areas on Route 412 / Leithsville Road.

Section B covered the GB1, GB2, and VC zoning districts along Route 378 and Old Philadelphia Pike.



Section C contained the GB2, VC, and O/L areas near Mountain Drive and Kohler Drive.

Section D was the LI and LM areas along Applebutter Road. The

Analysis includes tax parcel data for each parcel in each of these sections. They are identified by parcel number, address, owner, size, zoning, and use. Mapping and pictures of the areas were also provided to the Task Force.

