



DEINDUSTRIALIZED COMMUNITIES MARKET STUDY

Final Report

May 2022



Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION

Letter from the State Historic Preservation Office

31 May 2021

The Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO) is a bureau within the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, the commonwealth's official history agency. The PA SHPO manages all the commonwealth's historic preservation programs, one of which is participation in the Section 106 consultation process. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account effects of their undertakings on historic properties and to seek ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse effects.

In 2015 Shell Chemical Appalachia (Shell) required a permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) to build a petrochemical plant in Beaver County, Pennsylvania. The permit triggered Section 106 consultation; because the plant construction necessitated demolition of several historic properties and archaeological resources, the Corps, Shell, PA SHPO, and local consulting parties developed an agreement to mitigate those losses.

This market analysis is one of several mitigation projects from the agreement. This study's purpose is to create implementable strategies to help smaller deindustrialized communities leverage their historic resources for economic development purposes using data from public outreach, market analysis, and research.

The PA SHPO has long recognized the need for this study. The late 1970's- early 1980's collapse of the region's century-old heavy industrial economy resulted in massive job loss, depopulation, decaying infrastructure, environmental degradation and reduced local government capacity to cope with these challenges. In the national consciousness, larger cities such as Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Buffalo were the face of the "Rust Belt" label. However, over the past decade, many of these larger post-industrial cities have forged comebacks, creating new opportunity through development of alternative economic development strategies.

Though, lost in that narrative is that tens of thousands of people living in smaller communities that continue to struggle with the effects of deindustrialization. For these smaller communities, the transition to new economic paradigms is an ongoing struggle.

The PA SHPO documented that many historic buildings built during industrial prosperity remain largely intact and are often underutilized economic assets for these communities. The thoughtful identification, stabilization, preservation, and marketing of historic buildings can provide economic opportunity and a foundation for further revitalization. Individually, these opportunities are not of the industrial scale that built these communities in the first place, but collectively they create immense potential and can fit into holistic 21st century strategies of community and economic development.

This study is the PA SHPO contribution in providing local governments and communities as well as regional and statewide partners with data and implementable tools to use historic properties as economic assets. The holistic integration of these tools with other community resources such as riverfront access, sustainable living spaces and the vast human capital these communities possess will help create a roadmap for long-term success. It is our hope that this regional study's strategies and recommendations will be a model for the commonwealth and will be replicated in other communities on how to successfully integrate historic preservation tactics into broader revitalization plans.



Andrea L. MacDonald, Director and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office



Executive Summary

New Brighton, PA

Executive Summary

This report, commissioned by the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO) of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), investigates economic development and community revitalization opportunities in southwestern Pennsylvania communities that have experienced significant deindustrialization.

The study takes into account the marketability and use potential of historic properties within the two regions, which includes 12 communities in 3 counties. The study communities are located on the riverfront within the Monongahela River Valley and the Beaver and Ohio River Valley. The report identifies ways that these communities can leverage their older, historic commercial business districts, key historic buildings, and riverfront resources to advance economic development opportunities, and offers strategies to address identified challenges associated with this goal.

This report was informed by engagement with local and regional stakeholders and community members, through a public outreach process that included focus group sessions, public meetings, and individual interviews. Focus groups were comprised of local and regional leaders, historic preservation stakeholders, and economic development stakeholders.

The plan was developed in response to the construction of the Shell Appalachia ethane cracker plant located across the Ohio River from Beaver. Recognizing the historic significance of deindustrialized communities in the surrounding regions and the possible adverse effects of the plant, PA SHPO initiated the project, with assistance from the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Shell Appalachia provided funding.

This report is the final phase of a multi-phased project. Previous work included a historic resources survey in select communities along the Monongahela and Ohio rivers, and the compilation of an annotated bibliography of past planning efforts in the two regions. The plan culminates in a “How to Implement this Plan” checklist meant for a wide audience to understand, reference, and implement.

The study explores the existing conditions in each of the regions and communities in terms of demographics and employment, historic resources, riverfront access, and flood risk, and identifies key historic buildings and projects that can be leveraged to strengthen commercial districts. The study also includes market demand analyses and answers regional, market-based questions regarding appropriate investment, development, and sustainability strategies utilizing older and historic buildings.

PA SHPO retained the AKRF and evolveEA consultant team to formulate the regional market study, as well as targeted community-specific recommendations. PA SHPO provided valuable assistance throughout the planning process.

This report is developed with the understanding that historic preservation is an engine of economic revitalization. As such, this report produced the following 13 key recommendations:

- Recommendation #1:** Focus on attracting talent, rather than attracting big business.
- Recommendation #2:** Prevent and address vacancy and neglect of older buildings.
- Recommendation #3:** Reduce local barriers to the preservation of historic properties.
- Recommendation #4:** Encourage collaboration between communities.
- Recommendation #5:** Develop a regional vision while retaining and promoting local identity.
- Recommendation #6:** Harness the rivers as a recreational and scenic resource, and an opportunity for connecting communities.
- Recommendation #7:** Bolster capacity for the communities that need it most.
- Recommendation #8:** Embrace grassroots efforts; keep it local, maintain community character, and include residents' voices in the process.
- Recommendation #9:** Do not be afraid to have big ideas, which can shift a community's mindset and build relationships among community stakeholders in the process.
- Recommendation #10:** Include residential uses in the commercial center, to create pedestrian traffic, economic activity, and put "eyes on street;" for busier downtowns, include residential uses on upper floors of existing buildings.
- Recommendation #11:** Adaptively reuse downtown historic buildings for retail, restaurants, hotels, and entertainment uses.
- Recommendation #12:** Adaptively reuse downtown historic buildings for office space, while preventing ground floor offices on a portion of the main street.
- Recommendation #13:** Support each community's industrial heritage and future industrial potential, while strengthening downtown economic revitalization.

Study Team

The Deindustrialized Communities Market Study is a project of the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO) for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC).



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Study Consultants

In 2021 PA SHPO selected a team of consultants led by AKRF Inc which included evolve environment::architecture (evolveEA).



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Unless otherwise noted, photographs were taken by the AKRF and evolveEA team in February and March of 2022.