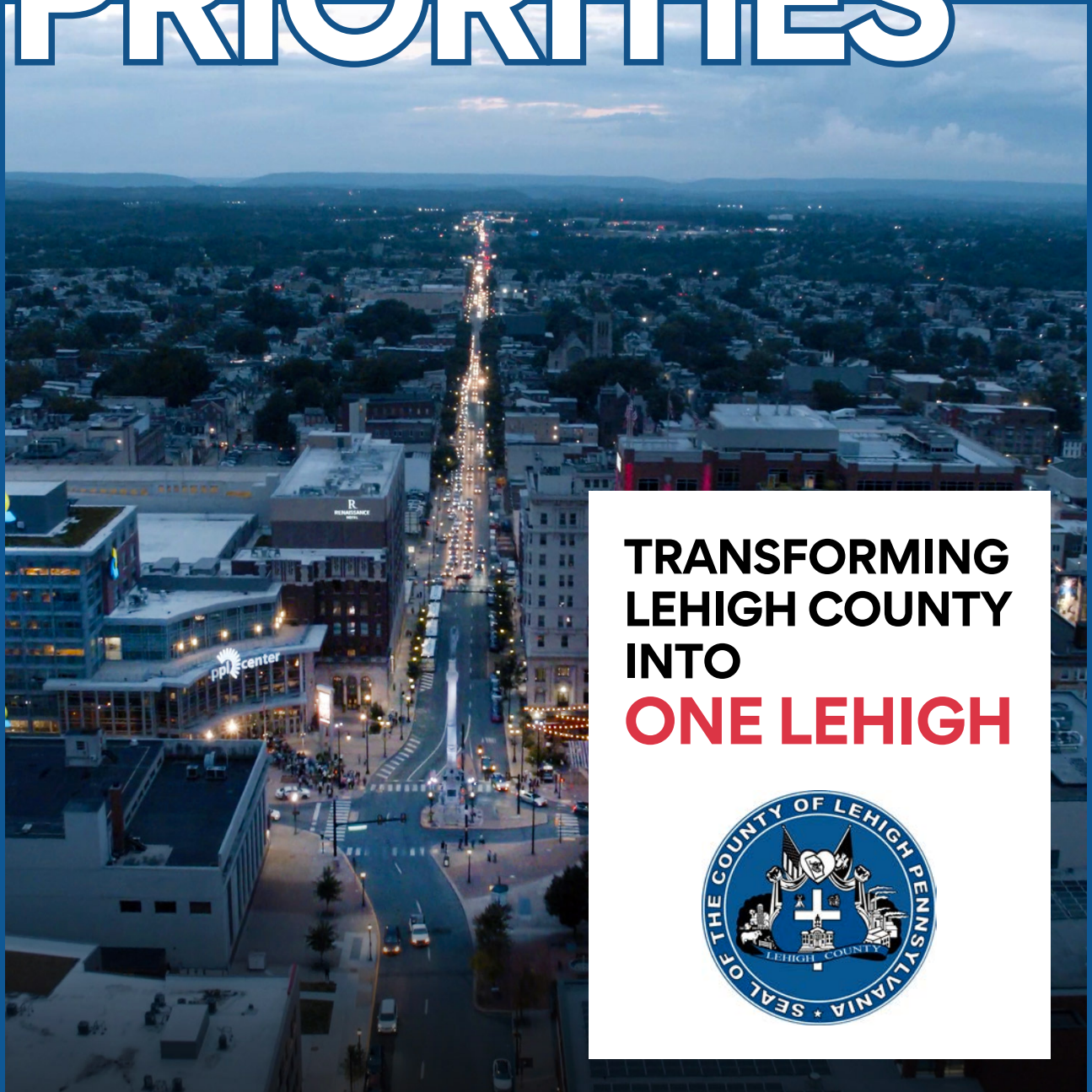


COUNTY EXECUTIVE JOSH SIEGEL'S

TRANSITION STRATEGY & PRIORITIES



**TRANSFORMING
LEHIGH COUNTY
INTO
ONE LEHIGH**



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE



**JOSH
SIEGEL**

County Executive

I want to thank the incredible dedication and service of the members of this transition team who volunteered their time, expertise and thoughts to help advance the objectives and goals of my administration.

From our very first meeting, the team was given a clear and simple directive: **dream big and think boldly about the direction the county needed to take to better serve our residents and constituents.**

This document reflects the ambition and aspiration of this administration to redefine the way we talk about and think about government and its responsibilities. For too long, a politics of cynicism and “small ball” solutions have sapped people's faith in government as a force for good, instilling in them a sense of powerlessness.

This document embodies the notion that the people in power must not be afraid to use it to advance and move their region forward. Powerlessness by those who wield it is a choice.

This transition document lays out **clear and articulable goals by which this administration can be measured and judged. It sets out clear goals in the space of human services, housing, economic development, public safety, personnel and labor relations, and local response to federal instability.** The policies put forth seek to renew faith in the power of the public sector as a capable and competent actor.

In an era defined by declining faith in institutions and government, our team set out to restore faith in their ability to meaningfully improve people's lives. This era calls for decisive leadership that acts quickly and boldly and wastes no time. I believe that this transition document sets this administration up to be the most successful and capable in the history of the county.

Together, we can make Lehigh County a model for building stronger, safer and more stable communities where all of our residents live well. We are **One Lehigh.**

A handwritten signature of Josh Siegel in black ink.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Transition Report reflects the collective work of multiple subcommittees and community leaders who contributed expertise, lived experience, and professional judgment to inform the next phase of Lehigh County governance. The strategies herein are intended to guide the County toward coordinated, measurable, and equitable outcomes for all residents of Lehigh County.

SUMMARY

Lehigh County enters this administration at a moment of both extraordinary opportunity and mounting pressure. Population growth, economic development and regional visibility are accelerating, while housing shortages, workforce instability, service fragmentation, and uncertainty in federal funding place new demands on county government.

This Report outlines a clear, actionable roadmap for the next four years, one that prioritizes coordination over fragmentation, prevention over crisis response, and long-term systems over short-term fixes.

Across all policy areas, it must be consistently emphasized that the County's most powerful role is not as a singular service provider, but as a convener, funder, and systems leader capable of aligning municipalities, nonprofit partners, institutions, employers, and residents around shared goals.

TRANSITION TEAM MEMBERS

TRANSITION CHAIRS

*** Jim Irwin**
Lehigh Valley Labor
Council/Local 542

*** Samantha Pearson**
County of Lehigh



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- * **Jasmine Rivera**
Pennsylvania Immigrant Coalition
- * **Mary Erdman**
Local Advocate
- * **Adam Hosey**
Planned Parenthood Pennsylvania
- * **Nicole Folino**
Second Harvest Food Bank

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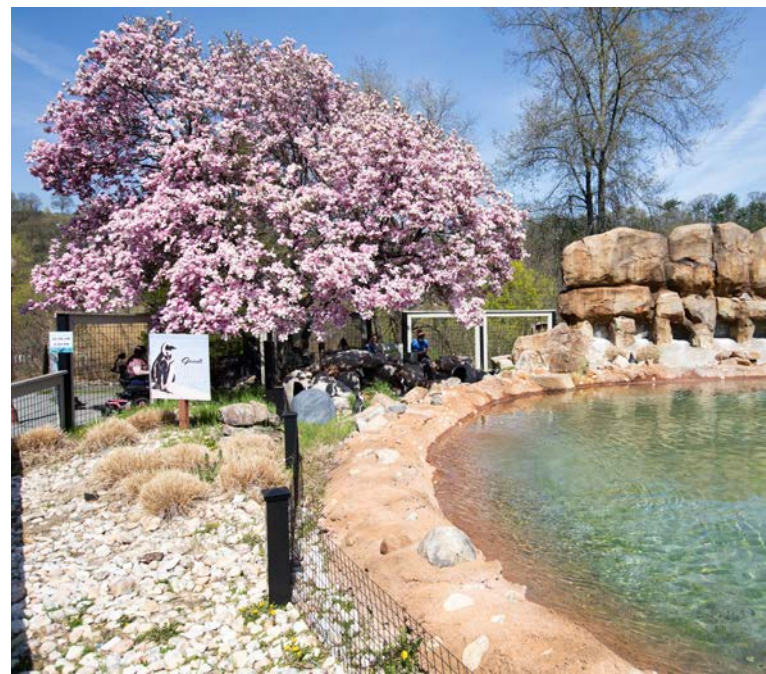
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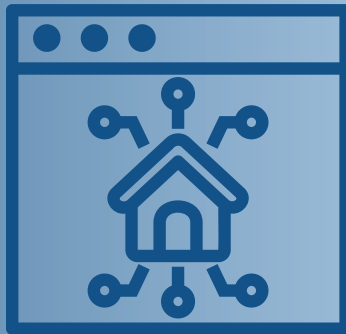


COUNTYWIDE PRIORITIES AT A GLANCE

The priorities and strategies contained in this report focus on six interconnected areas:



HUMAN SERVICES



HOUSING



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & REGIONAL GROWTH



LABOR & PERSONNEL



PUBLIC SAFETY



LOCAL RESPONSE & RESILIENCE

Together, these areas advance a shared vision:

A LEHIGH COUNTY WHERE ALL RESIDENTS HAVE STABLE HOUSING, ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES, MEANINGFUL ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, AND CONFIDENCE THAT COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS RESPONSIVE, COORDINATED, AND ACCOUNTABLE.



COUNTYWIDE GUIDING FRAMEWORK

The following principles should guide implementation across all departments and initiatives.

COUNTY AS CONVENER, BROKER, AND SYSTEMS LEADER

Lehigh County's greatest leverage lies in its ability to:

- Convene municipalities and regional partners
- Align funding streams and policy goals
- Broker partnerships across sectors
- Establish shared metrics and accountability

In many areas such as housing, homelessness, workforce, and public health, the County's role is to organize systems, not duplicate services already delivered by capable partners.

REGIONAL PROBLEMS REQUIRE REGIONAL SOLUTIONS

Housing affordability, homelessness, workforce availability, economic competitiveness, and public health challenges do not stop at municipal borders. Effective solutions require:

- Bi-county coordination
- Municipality, city, and county partnerships
- Shared planning, cost-sharing, and pooled resources

Fragmented approaches will continue to strain urban cores and dilute impact.

SHIFT FROM CRISIS RESPONSE TO PREVENTION AND STABILITY

The County must continue to meet urgent needs while investing more aggressively in:

- Housing stability and eviction prevention
- Childcare access and workforce support
- Mental health services and continuity of care
- Reentry planning and alternatives to incarceration

Preventing crises is more humane, more cost-effective, and more sustainable.

COUNTYWIDE GUIDING FRAMEWORK CONTINUED

DATA, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Programs and initiatives should be guided by:

- Shared data systems
- Public dashboards
- Clearly defined benchmarks
- Named owners responsible for outcomes

Transparency and accountability are essential to public trust and long-term success.

EQUITY THROUGH ACCESS AND INCLUSION

Equity is achieved not through fragmentation, but through universal access to systems that work. County policies should ensure:

- Dignified access to services regardless of income, language, immigration status, or prior justice involvement
- Language access and culturally competent service delivery
- Clear navigation pathways so residents can get help when they ask for it

SHARED MUNICIPAL RESPONSIBILITY

Urban municipalities are disproportionately burdened with housing, homelessness, and human services infrastructure. All municipalities must share responsibility for:

- Housing production
- Service provision
- Growth aligned with employment centers

TRANSITION IMPLEMENTATION LENS

Throughout this report, action items are intentionally structured to support:

- First 90 days
- Four-year measurable outcomes
- Long-term systems change (10+ years)

The intent is to lay the foundation for durable, regional solutions while also taking long overdue action in the short-term.

HUMAN SERVICES

STRATEGIC GOAL

Build a coordinated, county-led human services system focused on long-term stability, health, and access aligned with population growth and regional demand.

Human services challenges including housing instability, childcare shortages, mental health access, and nonprofit capacity are interconnected and must be addressed as a system rather than isolated programs.

COUNTYWIDE PLANNING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Childcare Market Analysis

- Commission a countywide third-party childcare market study modeled on successful regional efforts.
- Identify gaps, workforce impacts, quality challenges, and geographic disparities.
- Develop a county action plan addressing funding, administrative support, and employer partnerships.

Nonprofit Ecosystem Assessment

- Conduct a comprehensive review of nonprofit service capacity, duplication, and funding inefficiencies.
- Recommend consolidation, shared services, and capacity-building investments.
- Improve alignment between public, philanthropic, and institutional funding.

Human Services Data & Metrics

- Establish a data and metrics workgroup.
- Create a countywide human services scorecard with short- and long-term benchmarks.
- Publish progress through a public-facing dashboard.

HOUSING STABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS COORDINATION

Housing First Approach and Homelessness Prevention

- Create a County Homelessness Strategy Coordinator position, exploring cost-sharing with Allentown or a bi-county model.
- Invest in regional strategies and leverage Regional Homeless Advisory Board and Continuum of Care expertise.
- Align homelessness response with housing-first and diversion models.

YOUTH, SCHOOLS, AND FAMILY SUPPORTS

Supporting Mental Health Services and Programming

- Expand school-based mental health clinics in high-need and fast-growing districts.
- Conduct a countywide Out-of-School Time (OST) facilities and needs assessment.
- Support voluntary bell-to-bell cell phone policy pilots coordinated across districts while advocating for state legislation.

ACCESS, NAVIGATION, AND FEEDBACK

Providing Services Where People Seek Them

- Strengthen 211 and FindHelp systems to ensure residents who seek help receive it.
- Embed feedback mechanisms into program design and evaluation.

ANCHOR INSTITUTION PARTNERSHIPS

Creating Partnerships Based on Shared Services and Value

Establish a payment-in-lieu of taxes (PILOT) vehicle to leverage hospital and higher education contributions for:

- Housing
- Mental health
- Violence reduction
- Workforce stability

The Controller's Office should be partnered with to document fiscal impacts.



HOUSING

STRATEGIC GOAL

Ensure that every resident of Lehigh County has access to safe, stable, and affordable housing, while ending unsheltered homelessness, stabilizing households, and aligning housing production with economic growth.

Housing is the single most cross-cutting issue facing Lehigh County. It affects workforce availability, public health, public safety, educational outcomes, economic competitiveness, and quality of life. This plan addresses both the urgent crisis of unsheltered homelessness and the long-term shortage of housing supply, which continues to drive instability across the region.

Housing is also critical to supporting workforce affordability, retaining talent, and preserving farmland and open space.

PHASE 1: DECLARE & ORGANIZE AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Regional Homelessness Emergency Declaration

- Lehigh County, in coordination with Allentown and regional partners, will declare a Regional Homelessness Emergency.
- This declaration unlocks speed, flexibility, and immediate action, accelerating procurement, funding reallocation, and intergovernmental coordination.

Emergency Homelessness Command Center

- Led by jointly appointed Emergency Homelessness Directors (EHDs) from both counties.
- Responsible for recommending resource allocation and quarterly public reporting.

Command Center Composition & Operations

- County human services leadership, municipal leadership, Continuum of Care, shelter operators, outreach teams, and behavioral health providers.
- Operates with disaster-response urgency, including:
 - Weekly By-Name List reviews
 - Frequent cross-agency check-ins
 - Monthly public dashboard
 - Named leads for Outreach, Housing Placement, and Landlord Engagement

Immediate Unsheltered Census within 60 days of Emergency Declaration

- Map encampments and identify every unsheltered individual by name.
- Conduct standardized assessments to create a closed, solvable universe.
- Reconcile with the annual HUD-required Point-in-Time Count within 14 days.

PHASE 2: IMMEDIATE INDOOR ALTERNATIVES

Low-Barrier Emergency Indoor Housing

- Expand 24/7 shelters, utilize hotel/motel leasing, and partner with faith-based facilities.
- Emphasize safety, dignity, and accessibility; minimal entry requirements; no sobriety or treatment preconditions; accommodation of partners, pets, and possessions.

Behavioral Health Stabilization Units

- Clinically staffed, housing-linked units to reduce emergency room cycling and ensure continuity of care.

Income, Benefits & Documentation Blitz

- Embed benefits specialists in shelters to fast-track access to state IDs, SSI/SSDI, Medicaid within 90 days.

PHASE 3: PERMANENT HOUSING SURGE

Rapid Re-Housing at Scale

- Master lease apartments and create a landlord risk mitigation fund.
- Offer incentives like signing bonuses; require permanent housing plans within 30 days of placement.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Prioritization

- Accelerate acquisition and development of PSH units.
- Explore utilization of county facilities.
- Aggressively deploy project-based vouchers.
- Prioritize individuals driving chronic homelessness.

PHASE 4: ENCAMPMENT RESOLUTION & PREVENTION

Housing-First Encampment Resolution Protocol

- Encampments resolved only after documented housing offers and repeated outreach.
- Law enforcement plays a safety/support role rather than enforcement-first.

Diversion & Inflow Prevention

- Shelter diversion at first contact using flexible financial assistance.
- Eviction prevention surge, emergency rental assistance, and legal representation.
- Institutional discharge coordination agreements with hospitals, jails, and treatment facilities.

Metrics & Accountability

- Public, monthly reporting on unsheltered count, encampments, average days from outreach to housing, and returns to homelessness.
- Named metric owners to ensure accountability.
- Target outcomes: zero unsheltered encampments, Functional Zero sustained for 90 days, reduction in chronic homelessness.

COUNTYWIDE HOUSING STRATEGY AND BENCHMARKS

- Establish 5- and 10-year housing production targets.
- Require municipalities to adopt local housing plans aligned with the County Master Plan.
- Challenge municipalities to identify their contribution to countywide goals.
- Publish annual progress reports tracking: units produced, permitting timelines, affordability outcomes, and eviction metrics.

Affordable Housing Board

- Policy design, coordination, oversight, monitoring of equity and accessibility goals.

INCREASING HOUSING SUPPLY

Workforce & Missing Middle Housing

- Support zoning updates to allow duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, small multifamily buildings, and ADUs.
- Focus on workforce housing at 80–120% AMI and first-time homebuyer inventory in areas with underutilized utilities.
- Provide municipalities with model ordinances, financial impact analyses, and technical assistance.

First-Time Homebuyer Inventory

- Encourage townhomes and small-lot housing.
- Limit speculative pressure on single- and two-family homes.
- Align zoning and infrastructure to support starter housing.
- Support legislation barring corporate investors from bidding during the first 75 days on the market.

EXPAND OBTAINABLE HOUSING THROUGH INCENTIVES & INVESTMENT

LERTA, Affordable Housing, and Housing Production Fund

- Champion LERTA for workforce housing and mixed-use development; prioritize high-opportunity, underutilized sites.
- Advocate for increased LIHTC allocations.
- Coordinate with Northampton County and PHFA to develop workforce housing programs and LERTA/PILOT hybrids.
- Advance \$100M Housing Plan and Production Fund via public-private partnerships and bonding authority to support up to 1,500 units in walkable, high-density areas.

REGULATORY AND PERMITTING REFORMS

Zoning Reform

- Duplexes and triplexes in single-family zones.
- Medium-density housing along transit and growth corridors.
- Enable ADUs.
- County zoning toolkit with model ordinances, best practices, design guides, and financial impact examples.
- Evaluate opportunities for “sprawl repair.”

Permitting & Process Streamlining

- Comprehensive review and analysis of all county review and permitting processes including County departments, authorities, and agencies.
- Address Chapter 102 delays and inconsistent guidance.
- Improve cross-department coordination and apply coordinated pressure at the state level.

MUNICIPAL & INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

County-Developer Housing Roundtable

- Engage developers, municipalities, County departments, and authorities and agencies.
- Identify regulatory bottlenecks, improve predictability, and shape feasible housing policy.

Shared Housing Responsibility

- Engage suburban townships to align housing supply with employment growth.
- Encourage housing needs assessments modeled after Allentown’s 2025 Housing Needs Assessment.
- Incentivize participation via budget allocations, infrastructure investment, and program priority.

Align Housing with Jobs & Infrastructure

- Partner with municipalities and organizations to link housing production to job growth, transportation, and existing infrastructure.

HOUSING STABILITY, AFFORDABILITY, AND EQUITY

Eviction Prevention & Homelessness Reduction

- Fund eviction prevention programs, expand rental assistance and rapid rehousing.
- Engage employers in workforce housing solutions.
- Explore County-managed Right to Counsel

Homeownership Protection & Market Fairness

- Legislation to prevent corporate bidding on single- and two-family homes during first 75 days.
- Prioritize local residents and first-time buyers.

Housing Stability, Equity, & Access

- Ensure compliance with Fair Housing Act; allow by-right construction by faith-based/nonprofit institutions.
- Guarantee by-right approval of housing consistent with building standards and environmental protections.
- Research and publish viable housing typologies.
- Partner with churches and religious institutions to use tax-exempt land.

BLIGHT REMEDIATION AND REUSE OF COUNTY ASSETS

- Launch Countywide Blight Remediation Initiative in coordination with Lehigh County Redevelopment Authority with up-to-date municipal inventories.
- Prioritize redevelopment using LERTA and housing incentives.
- Advance reuse of underutilized public assets (e.g., Community Corrections Center).
- Partner with academic institutions to support research, planning, and redevelopment strategies.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL GROWTH

STRATEGIC GOAL

Position Lehigh County for inclusive, resilient, and regionally coordinated economic growth that strengthens the tax base, supports employers, expands opportunity for residents, and aligns development with infrastructure, housing, workforce, and quality-of-life needs.

Economic development in Lehigh County is no longer simply about attracting employers. It is about managing growth, ensuring communities can absorb it equitably, addressing housing and workforce affordability, and aligning public investments so growth improves quality of life rather than strains systems. The County must serve as a strategic convener, infrastructure partner, and regional coordinator as growth accelerates in logistics, advanced manufacturing, health care, life sciences, and emerging sectors such as data centers.

COUNTY ROLE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Lehigh County should move beyond a project-by-project approach and adopt a countywide economic growth framework that integrates land use and housing supply, workforce development, transportation and infrastructure, municipal capacity and fiscal health, and quality-of-place investments. Addressing the regional housing shortage is central to this strategy, as affordable housing is critically important to attracting and retaining a skilled workforce. Without sufficient workforce housing, economic growth cannot be sustained. The County must play a leadership role in balancing housing, industrial development, open space, and farmland preservation, recognizing that farmland preservation contributes to long-term economic stability and quality of life while housing production supports workforce needs.

Action Steps

- Develop a County Economic Growth Framework aligned with the County Comprehensive Plan, Lehigh Valley Planning Commission forecasts, workforce strategies, and housing supply goals.
- Identify priority growth corridors and employment centers where housing, transit, and infrastructure investments can be layered together.
- Publish a biennial Economic Conditions and Growth Impacts Report that includes housing affordability, workforce availability, land consumption, and infrastructure capacity.

Key Metrics

- Job growth by sector
- Wage growth and affordability relative to housing costs
- Commercial and industrial tax base growth
- Infrastructure and utility capacity utilization
- Housing production near employment centers

ALIGNING GROWTH WITH INFRASTRUCTURE, HOUSING, AND LAND USE

Lehigh County's fastest growth is occurring in suburban employment centers often disconnected from housing, transit, and services. To reduce congestion, housing pressure, and municipal fiscal stress, the County should designate growth corridors where infrastructure already exists or can be expanded efficiently and where housing and transit-oriented development can be supported. Data should be used to align job growth, transportation investments, housing production targets, and open space preservation.

County Actions

- Conduct a countywide infrastructure readiness assessment focused on water and sewer capacity, transportation access, stormwater constraints, environmental conditions, and site readiness.
- Prioritize infrastructure investments that unlock mixed-use and workforce housing development, support employment centers, and reduce permitting delays.

Funding Alignment

- Coordinate county capital funds, state infrastructure programs, and federal grants.
- Work with the Commonwealth to develop dedicated funding mechanisms for infrastructure projects.
- Incentivize municipalities that align infrastructure investments with county growth and housing priorities.

BUSINESS RETENTION, EXPANSION, AND TALENT STRATEGY

Business Retention and Expansion (BRE)

Lehigh County should establish a formal Business Retention and Expansion program in partnership with chambers of commerce, industrial development corporations, and workforce partners. Employer outreach should focus on workforce availability, housing affordability impacts, infrastructure needs, regulatory barriers, and expansion plans, with early-warning indicators developed for at-risk employers.

Talent Attraction and Retention

Economic competitiveness increasingly depends on people. The County should partner with employers, colleges, and municipalities to market Lehigh County as a place to work, live, and raise families by aligning housing, childcare, transportation, and quality-of-life investments. Regional marketing should highlight affordability relative to peer regions, access to jobs, and arts, culture, and recreational assets.

INCLUSIVE, PLACE-BASED, AND EXPERIENTIAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Supporting Small Businesses and Downtowns

Lehigh County should support place-based strategies that activate main streets and strengthen local economies. This will include providing funding and staffing support for community events, festivals, downtown activation, and support for small businesses as well as formalized Main Street programs.

Experiential Development

Create a Lehigh County Experiential Development Initiative (LC-EDI) to recruit, grow, and retain attractions, arts, culture, and experiential retail as engines of economic development. This initiative would position the Lehigh Valley as a regional arts and culture destination while supporting local jobs and tourism-driven small businesses.

INDUSTRIAL GROWTH, LOGISTICS, AND REGIONAL BALANCE

Managing Industrial and Data Center Growth

The County should continue to assess cumulative impacts of logistics, warehousing, and data center development on infrastructure, utilities, and communities.

Adaptive Reuse and Redevelopment

Lehigh County should prioritize adaptive reuse of former industrial properties, brownfields, and infill parcels for mixed-use development. Continued support for the Lehigh County Redevelopment Authority is critical. Priority sites include the Lehigh Valley Dairy Cooperative site in Whitehall Township, Crane Iron Works in Catasauqua Borough, the Lehigh Riverfront and Lehigh Structural Steel area near the Tilghman Street Bridge, and redevelopment opportunities along MacArthur Road from Whitehall to Allentown. The County should articulate a reimagined redevelopment vision for this corridor to guide future investment.

Transit-Oriented Development

Lehigh County should undertake a planning study for the creation of a Transit Revitalization Investment District (TRID) to support equitable, transit-oriented development.

FUNDING TOOLS, INCENTIVES, AND PUBLIC ASSETS

Dedicated Economic Development Funding

- Establish a Tourism Improvement District (TID) funded by a modest annual hotel room assessment fee dedicated solely to tourism marketing and promotion. Increased tourism would support local jobs, small businesses, and tax revenues benefiting public services and infrastructure. This effort should be pursued jointly with Northampton County.
- Support state-enabled infrastructure funding mechanisms and advocate for regional investment.

Leveraging Public Authorities

- Engage Lehigh County public authorities as tools for economic development and workforce expansion.
- Apply Responsible Contracting Ordinances (RCOs) to ensure public projects support fair labor practices, workforce quality, and local economic benefits.
- Create RCO Committee with labor leaders.

STREAMLINING PROCESSES, COMMUNICATIONS, AND TRANSPARENCY

Permitting and Site Readiness

- Evaluate and streamline county design review, application, permitting, and approval processes.
- Coordinate with the Commonwealth's Office of Transformation and Opportunity (OTO) to provide a concierge-style, one-stop approach to permitting and site readiness.

Communications and Branding

- Create a new, professional, and robust county communications function with a unified branding message that clearly articulates who Lehigh County is and what it offers, highlighting both the energy of a younger workforce and the experience of established industries.
- Develop and market the County's quality-of-place story.
- Redesign the Lehigh County website to be more user-friendly and include direct links to available retail, office, land, and industrial sites through the LVEDC commercial real estate database.
- Clearly articulate the value and standards associated with tax incentives such as LERTA and TIF and provide public education on what occurs inside industrial buildings to counter misinformation and highlight job creation across educational levels.



LABOR AND PERSONNEL

STRATEGIC GOAL

Build a stable, high-performing, and future-ready county workforce that delivers essential services effectively, adapts to changing demands, and reflects the values of accountability, equity, and professionalism.

Lehigh County's ability to execute every priority in this report depends on its people. Labor and personnel challenges including recruitment delays, retention pressures, succession gaps, and rising service demands require a coordinated, data-driven response. This section outlines strategies to stabilize the workforce in the short term while modernizing county employment systems for long-term resilience.

WORKFORCE STABILITY AND CAPACITY

Current Challenges

Lehigh County, like many public employers, faces:

- Increased competition for talent from private and nonprofit sectors
- Retirement-driven knowledge loss
- High vacancy rates in critical service areas
- Burnout among frontline staff
- Lengthy hiring and onboarding timelines

THESE PRESSURES ARE MOST ACUTE IN HUMAN SERVICES, PUBLIC SAFETY, CORRECTIONS, IT, AND SKILLED TRADES.

Workforce Stabilization Strategy

- Conduct a countywide workforce capacity assessment to identify:
 - Critical vacancies
 - Hard-to-fill classifications
 - Overtime and burnout risks
- Prioritize stabilization in mission-critical departments.
- Develop targeted recruitment and retention plans by department.

Key Metrics

- Vacancy rates
- Time-to-hire
- Overtime usage
- Turnover rates by classification

RECRUITMENT, HIRING, AND ONBOARDING REFORM

Modernizing Hiring Processes

- Review and streamline civil service and hiring procedures.
- Expand use of:
 - Continuous recruitment lists and centralized applicant screening
 - Provisional appointments where legally permissible
- Improve coordination between Human Resources, departments, and unions.

Talent Pipelines and Partnerships

- Establish formal pipelines with:
 - Community colleges
 - Universities
 - Trade schools
- Expand internships, apprenticeships, and paid fellowships.
- Partner with workforce development agencies to reach underrepresented candidates.

Onboarding and Early Retention

- Standardize onboarding across departments.
- Assign mentors or peer supports for new hires.
- Conduct structured 30-, 60-, and 90-day check-ins.

COMPENSATION, CLASSIFICATION, AND BENEFITS

Competitive Compensation Strategy

- Conduct regular market comparisons for key classifications.
- Use targeted compensation adjustments rather than across-the-board increases when appropriate.
- Explore:
 - Retention stipends
 - Shift differentials
 - Hard-to-fill premiums

Benefits and Work-Life Balance

- Evaluate benefits competitiveness, including:
 - Health care
 - Leave policies
 - Retirement options
- Expand flexible scheduling where operationally feasible.
- Support remote or hybrid work arrangements for eligible positions.
- Implement a paid family leave policy for county employees starting at 8 weeks.
- Explore adding IVF benefit to the county's healthcare plan with a lifetime cap.

LABOR RELATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Collaborative Labor Relations

Principles

- Transparency
- Early engagement
- Mutual respect

Actions

- Establish regular labor-management meetings.
- Share data on staffing, workload, and service demands.
- Collaborate on solutions to address overtime, safety concerns and burnout.

Culture and Employee Engagement

- Conduct periodic employee engagement surveys.
- Use results to guide management improvements.
- Recognize and reward excellence and innovation.

TRAINING, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

Continuous Learning

- Expand access to training in:
 - Leadership development
 - Supervisory skills
 - Trauma-informed practice
 - Data and technology skills
- Create a centralized training calendar and learning platform.

Succession Planning

- Identify high-risk positions due to retirement or turnover.
- Develop succession plans for:
 - Department leadership
 - Specialized technical roles
- Document institutional knowledge and standard operating procedures.

EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Equitable Workforce Practices

- Ensure hiring, promotion, and discipline processes are fair and consistent.
- Expand outreach to diverse candidate pools.
- Monitor workforce demographics and advancement trends.

DATA, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Tracking and Improving What Matters Most

- Create a county workforce dashboard tracking:
 - Vacancies
 - Hiring timelines
 - Turnover
 - Training participation
- Assign ownership for key workforce metrics.
- Use data to inform budget and policy decisions.

PUBLIC SAFETY

STRATEGIC GOAL

Advance a modern, coordinated, and prevention-oriented public safety system that protects residents, supports first responders and public safety staff, integrates behavioral health and reentry services, reduces recidivism, and emphasizes accountability, dignity, transparency, and community trust.

Public safety in Lehigh County extends beyond traditional law enforcement. It includes emergency response, behavioral health crises, corrections and reentry, violence prevention, jail operations, and coordination across municipal boundaries. Rising service demands, workforce retention challenges, mental health and substance-use crises, and increasing complexity of calls require a systems-based, county-led approach that prioritizes collaboration, humane outcomes, and evidence-based decision-making.

INTEGRATED PUBLIC SAFETY FRAMEWORK

County Role and Leadership

Lehigh County should serve as the central convener and integrator of public safety systems, ensuring coordination across county departments, municipal police and fire agencies, emergency medical services, behavioral health providers, courts, corrections, reentry partners, and community-based organizations.

Actions

- Establish a County Public Safety Coordinating Council to align policy, funding, training, and operations across agencies.
- Include representation from corrections, behavioral health, human services, workforce partners, community organizations, and individuals with lived experience.
- Use the Council to strengthen cross-collaboration, identify funding opportunities and partnerships, and ensure alignment between jail operations, reentry services, and community-based supports.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND 911 MODERNIZATION

Strengthening Emergency Communications

- Continue modernization of the 911 system, including staffing stabilization, technology upgrades, and cross-training for call-takers and dispatchers.
- Improve call triage to better route mental health and substance-use related calls to appropriate crisis response resources.
- Improve data sharing and coordination between 911, EMS, behavioral health providers, and crisis response systems.

Staffing and Workforce Support

- Address recruitment/retention challenges among dispatchers, EMS, fire, and other first responders.
- Expand training focused on behavioral health awareness, crisis de-escalation, and trauma-informed response.
- Strengthen workforce retention strategies for public safety staff through professional development, supervision support, and engagement initiatives.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND CRISIS RESPONSE

Crisis Response Integration

A growing share of public safety calls involve behavioral health crises rather than criminal activity. The County should expand co-responder and alternative response models pairing law enforcement or EMS with behavioral health clinicians and, where appropriate, non-law-enforcement responses.

- Expand coordination with the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, including staffing capacity for 24/7 coverage.
- Develop standardized protocols for mental health crises, substance-use emergencies, and frequent utilizers of emergency services.

Crisis Stabilization and Diversion

- Increase access to crisis stabilization units and short-term residential treatment.
- Expand diversion from arrest and incarceration into treatment when appropriate.
- Strengthen coordination between crisis response teams, homelessness services, and reentry providers to reduce repeat emergency contacts.

CORRECTIONS, REENTRY, AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Corrections Operations and Facility Use

- Conduct a comprehensive review of corrections operations focusing on staffing and safety, programming and treatment access, disciplinary practices, and use of physical space.
- Evaluate underutilized facilities, including the Community Corrections Center, for transitional housing, reentry programming, supportive services, or alternatives to incarceration.
- Improve communication and coordination between the county jail and state prisons to enhance continuity of care and operational efficiency.

Reentry and Recidivism Reduction

- Reduce recidivism by expanding supportive programming both inside the jail and throughout the reentry process, with continuity of care post-release as a core objective.
- Develop an individualized reentry plan for every jail resident at least 60 days prior to discharge, in partnership with organizations such as PNLV, Pinebrook Family Answers, and other community providers. Plans should include family reunification, life skills training, job readiness and placement, mental health services, and benefits enrollment.
- Provide degree-track education, vocational training, and job skills programs aligned with projected economic growth sectors.
- Ensure adequate mental health services for jail residents, prioritizing community-based providers who can continue care after release.

- Use earned time credits for participation in training and rehabilitative programs as incentives and, where appropriate, to support early release to home confinement or reentry centers.
- Expand use of personal monitoring devices for non-violent offenders and individuals unable to post bail to reduce unnecessary incarceration while maintaining public safety and community ties.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Prevention-Focused Strategies

- Support evidence-based violence prevention initiatives, including hospital-based violence intervention programs and community-based outreach and mediation.
- Align prevention efforts with youth programming, housing stability, employment pathways, and reentry supports as part of a broader community safety strategy.

Fire, EMS, and Emergency Preparedness

- Support volunteer and career fire and EMS agencies through training, recruitment assistance, equipment, and capital investments.
- Improve regional mutual aid coordination.
- Align emergency preparedness planning with behavioral health response capacity and correctional system needs during emergencies.

DATA, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND PUBLIC TRUST

Performance Metrics

Create a public safety performance framework tracking emergency response time, call types and outcomes, diversion and treatment referrals, recidivism rates, program participation and completion, use-of-force and complaint data, and reentry outcomes. Program efficacy should be reviewed regularly using evidence-based, data-driven evaluation.

Transparency and Oversight

- Enhance transparency by establishing a Prison Advisory Board pursuant to Section 402(k) of the County Charter through ordinance. The Board should include citizen members and have authority related to jail oversight, access to information, policy recommendations, and public education.
- Improve accountability by requiring body cameras in jail settings and allowing jail residents to submit grievances without requiring counselor approval.
- Hold regular public meetings and publish accessible information on jail operations, outcomes, and reform efforts to build community trust and informed civic engagement.

LOCAL RESPONSE AND RESILIENCE

STRATEGIC GOAL

Strengthen Lehigh County's capacity to anticipate, withstand, respond to, and recover from emergencies and long-term stressors—including public health threats, climate impacts, economic shocks, infrastructure failures, and rapid shifts in federal policy—while ensuring equitable outcomes, civil rights protections, and municipal sovereignty across all communities.

Local response and resilience are no longer episodic functions reserved for disasters alone. They are ongoing responsibilities that require coordination across departments, municipalities, health systems, utilities, nonprofits, and residents—particularly in an era of volatile federal funding, policy instability, and escalating demands placed on local governments. This section outlines how Lehigh County can institutionalize resilience as a core governing function, grounded in local protections, co-governance, and regional collaboration rather than reactive crisis management.

COUNTYWIDE RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

Lehigh County should adopt a formal Countywide Resilience Framework that integrates:

- Emergency management and disaster preparedness
- Public health readiness and healthcare access
- Climate adaptation and environmental protection
- Infrastructure, cybersecurity, and systems continuity
- Social resilience, civil rights protections, and equity

This framework should explicitly recognize that recent federal actions require stronger local governance capacity to protect residents and municipal operations.

The framework should align with:

- State emergency management and public health plans (PEMA, PA DOH)
- Regional planning and mutual aid efforts
- Federal preparedness standards where applicable, while planning for scenarios involving reduced or eliminated federal support (e.g., FEMA drawdown)

Governance and Leadership

- Designate a County Resilience Lead or standing Interdepartmental Resilience Team reporting directly to the County Executive.
- Establish a Resilience Advisory Group including emergency management, public health, human services, public works and infrastructure, information technology and data governance, municipal representatives, and community-based and civil rights organizations.
- Integrate resilience considerations including civil rights protections, data privacy, and service continuity into capital budgeting, contracting, and policy decisions.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND PREPAREDNESS

Strengthening Emergency Operations

- Review and update the County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) to:
 - Reflect lessons learned from COVID-19, climate-related events, and recent supply chain disruptions
 - Clarify county and municipal roles in the event of reduced federal emergency support
 - Integrate behavioral health, human services, food access, and healthcare continuity
- Conduct regular tabletop and full-scale exercises with:
 - Municipal governments
 - Hospitals and health systems
 - Utilities and critical infrastructure operators
 - School districts and higher education institutions

Planning for Reduced Federal Capacity

Given potential reductions or elimination of FEMA support:

- Short-term: Review and update all existing emergency and disaster response plans.
- Long-term: Convene a countywide disaster preparedness summit with emergency responders, municipalities, law enforcement, hospitals, schools, utilities, and PEMA to reassess response models, funding strategies, and material needs in the absence of federal backstopping.

PUBLIC HEALTH READINESS, HEALTHCARE ACCESS, AND COMMUNICATION

Regional Health Coordination and Trust

- Explore creation of a bi-county or regional public health communications bureau to:
 - Provide consistent, science-based medical guidance
 - Counter misinformation
 - Address vaccine confidence and public health compliance
- Develop shared messaging protocols with hospitals, schools, municipalities, and trusted community partners.

Healthcare Access and Protection

- Adopt a Welcoming Policy affirming that all residents—regardless of immigration status—can access county services without fear of immigration enforcement.
- Commit to U and T Visa support policies, in collaboration with the District Attorney and local law enforcement, to protect immigrant victims of crime and encourage participation in the justice system.
- Adopt a County Shield Policy committing Lehigh County to:
 - Not using county resources to assist in prosecutions related to legal healthcare, including abortion, contraception, and gender-affirming care
 - Not contracting with healthcare organizations that cooperate with ideologically motivated prosecutions
 - Upholding HIPAA protections for legal medical care

Public Health Infrastructure Investments

- Commit county funding or grant support to Planned Parenthood in Allentown as a critical public health safety net provider.
- Partner with the Allentown Health Bureau to:
 - Counter misinformation from crisis pregnancy centers
 - Direct residents to legitimate medical providers
 - Educate college students on accessing real healthcare
- Support inclusion of sexual and reproductive health indicators in the next Community Health Needs Assessment and analyze the economic impact of healthcare access on workforce participation and regional stability.
- Coordinate with Allentown Police to ensure safe, harassment-free access to healthcare facilities while respecting First Amendment rights.

Medical Debt Relief

- Allocate county funds to purchase and forgive medical debt of Lehigh County residents as a form of economic resilience and relief amid Medicaid cuts and ACA dismantling.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PREPAREDNESS

Climate Risk Assessment

- Conduct a countywide climate vulnerability assessment focusing on:
 - Flooding and stormwater
 - Extreme heat
 - Air quality
 - Transportation corridors, rail lines, hazardous material routes
 - Energy grid stability and data center expansion

Infrastructure and Land Use Resilience

- Align climate resilience planning with:
 - Housing and land use decisions
 - Infrastructure and utility investments
 - Economic development strategies
- Incorporate resilience and climate risk criteria into capital project evaluation.
- Expand green infrastructure, stormwater management, and nature-based solutions.

SOCIAL, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Protecting Vulnerable and Targeted Populations

- Integrate human services, civil rights protections, and equity considerations into all emergency planning.
- Establish Lehigh County as a Safe Space for immigrants, LGBTQ+ residents, abortion seekers, youth, and other marginalized communities, with clear accountability measures for discrimination.
- Strengthen partnerships with nonprofits, faith-based organizations, food banks and pantry networks, and community anchors and trusted messengers.

Municipal Identification and Access

- Establish a Municipal Identification Card program and recognize municipal IDs as valid for accessing county services, ensuring continuity of access amid federal documentation changes.

INFRASTRUCTURE, UTILITIES, DATA, AND SYSTEMS RESILIENCE

Critical Infrastructure Protection

- Identify and prioritize protection of:
 - Water and wastewater systems
 - Energy and fuel supply
 - Transportation and rail networks
 - Communications and data infrastructure

Data Privacy and Municipal Sovereignty

- Adopt strict, countywide data privacy and non-cooperation policies that:
 - Limit sharing of personal identifying information with federal agencies unless legally required
 - Protect county personnel and resources from being mobilized for federal enforcement actions
- Review and publicly disclose all federal leases, MOUs, and agreements (e.g., DHS, U.S. Marshals) and terminate those that do not clearly serve county residents.

Cyber and Systems Resilience

- Strengthen cybersecurity preparedness and continuity-of-operations planning.
- Train staff on protocols for system disruptions and data protection.

FOOD SYSTEMS, STABILITY, AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Food Access and Local Supply Chains

- Maintain and prioritize the SFPP Food Purchase Program contract with Second Harvest Food Bank to support nearly 25,000 residents and 41 pantries, leveraging wholesale purchasing power and PA-grown products.
- Expand local food systems by:
 - Advancing the Seed Farm with agriculture-adjacent partners
 - Supporting farmland preservation, farmer education, and land access
- Enhance participation in the Senior Farmer Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) through improved outreach, simplified applications, and multilingual access.

Coordination Public and Private Funds

- Position the County as a convener to establish joint public-private trust funds supporting:
 - Food and housing security
 - Paid leave
 - Healthcare cost containment
 - Housing construction and stabilization

CO-GOVERNANCE, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

County Summits and Regional Collaboration

- Institutionalize regular County Summits bringing together agencies, municipalities, nonprofits, and regional partners to address funding changes, legislation, and best practices.

Department of Community Engagement

- Establish a Department of Community Engagement to:
 - Overhaul county communications
 - Formalize community input and co-governance
 - Manage advisory boards and human relations commissions
 - Facilitate access to public benefits and funding
- Short-term Feedback: Use pulse surveys, town halls, and community feedback to evaluate impact.

Voter Education and Language Access

- Invest in voter education, registration, and outreach through:
 - Multilingual materials
 - Website resources and videos
 - Mobile voter services and community partnerships
- Expand language access by:
 - Translating county materials into Spanish and additional languages
 - Prioritizing bilingual skills (Spanish and Arabic) in hiring and promotion



A COUNTY BUILT FOR THE FUTURE



LEHIGH COUNTY FACES RAPID GROWTH, RISING SERVICE DEMANDS, AND INCREASING UNCERTAINTY FROM HOUSING PRESSURES TO CLIMATE IMPACTS.

This transition report outlines a path forward grounded in coordination, data, equity, and accountability. Success will require:

- Strong county leadership
- Regional collaboration
- Willingness to experiment and adapt
- Clear metrics and public transparency

With deliberate action, Lehigh County can meet today's challenges while building systems capable of serving residents for decades to come.

YOU CAN REACH US.

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