



COUNTY OF LEHIGH

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Press Release

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Armstrong Delivers 2022 State of the County Address

Allentown, PA- On Thursday, February 17th, at 4:00PM, Lehigh County Executive, Phillips M. Armstrong delivered his 2022 State of the County Address at Coca-Cola Park. The 2022 address was presented to community members, business leaders, and government officials in compliance with current COVID-19 safety regulations. The event was hosted by the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC).

The 2022 State of the County Address covered topics including Lehigh County's COVID-19 mitigation efforts, general infrastructure projects, Cedarbrook Senior Care & Rehabilitation, emergency rental assistance, small business and nonprofit grant funding, and other highlights from county departments.

In the 2022 address, County Executive Armstrong dedicated his presentation to the residents of Lehigh County, stating:

"The 2022 State of the County Address will be dedicated to the people, and show how we as their county government will continue to work for them in the face of new and unprecedented challenges." Said Armstrong, "This is the time to share with our residents what we have planned for Lehigh County, and as County Executive, it is an honor to present these plans that will continue to shape and grow our community as we look to the future."

The following is a synopsis of Armstrong's 2022 State of the County Address.

Lehigh County continues to be in the longest State of Emergency Declaration in its history. The county has implemented COVID-19 mitigation efforts in all county facilities such as HVAC improvements, temperature screenings, mask usage, continual social distancing, and daily staff self-monitoring. The safety of county employees and citizens remain the highest priority as county operations continue without interference.

Lehigh County's Office of Emergency Management coordinates multiple meetings with healthcare providers, school districts, local businesses, and regional emergency coordinators to share best practices to minimize the impact of the pandemic. The county has partnered with the United Way to coordinate accessible PPE drop off sites, and also partnered with the Allentown Health Bureau to update vaccination locations. A mass vaccination and testing site plan has been developed by Lehigh County's Emergency Management team along with healthcare providers throughout our region. General Services and Aging departments worked collaboratively to create plans to provide vaccination services for homebound Lehigh County citizens.

The county continues to invest in its infrastructure by prioritizing necessary expansions, renovations, and repairs throughout the community. Preparations are underway to replace and repair or replace multiple Lehigh County Bridges, including the Wire Mill Bridge, Walnut Street Bridge, Devonshire Bridge, Geiger's Covered Bridge, Mosserville Bridge, and Manassas Guth Covered Bridge. During the past five years, Lehigh County's bridge maintenance team designed and executed the replaced two major spans across the Lehigh River: Coplay-Northampton and Hokendauqua-North Catasauqua. Both bridges completed and restored economic improvement to this location.

The ongoing major renovation plan for Lehigh County's Historic Old Courthouse, originally built in 1812, is projected to be completed by the end of the year. The county's utility garage underwent 175 vehicle inspections and 688 work orders, effectively maintaining a quick vehicle return under COVID-19 requirements. Lehigh County is currently evaluating the introduction of alternate fuel vehicles to its fleet.

Construction has begun at Cedarbrook Senior Care & Rehabilitation's Allentown campus in preparation for its new E-Wing. Once complete, the new ~145k square foot, four story, L-shaped wing will accommodate 240 residents, no more than two to a room, with access to private bathrooms. These improvements will create a foundation for advanced resident experiences and improve medical support planning. The expansion is projected to be completed by the end of 2023. Lehigh County continues to improve HVAC systems at Cedarbrook's Fountain Hill campus, and will continue to monitor resident needs.

Cedarbrook currently maintains its 4 Star CMS Rating, ranking the county-operated facility as an elite skilled nursing home. This high care ranking was maintained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and through the significant national labor shortage of healthcare workers. Lehigh County continues to balance taxpayer contributions and resident needs to create a safe environment for the county's most "in need" citizens.

Lehigh County's Department of Farmland Preservation achieved a new milestone and exceeded over 26,000 acres of farmland preservation this year. Over 200 farms were inspected to meet preservation requirements, and recent updates to Lehigh County's Farmland Preservation Program were approved by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. New subdivision guidelines were updated, approved, and recorded. Applications for farmland preservation are open year-round in Lehigh County. Currently, there is a waiting list for over 50 farms.

Lehigh County continues to provide grant assistance for rental relief, small businesses, and nonprofits as we head into 2022. In 2021, over 3,000 families received emergency rental assistance, and more than 650 businesses received funding from the American Rescue Plan.

On Friday, February 18, 2022 the Lehigh County COVID-19 Small Business Grant Program will reopen to the public for a third round of applications. In partnership with the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce, Lehigh County will allocate an estimated \$2.5 million in funding for local businesses with 100 or fewer employees. Eligible businesses can apply for up to \$15,000 in order to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and its related expenses. Businesses that received funding from previous rounds are not eligible to apply.

The Lehigh County Office of Voter Registration is hosting free online webinars to share election information and resources to the public. This includes information on how to register to vote, how to make changes to one's voter registration, how to become a poll worker, etc. The office is readily available to all guests and residents seeking to learn more information about their elections. In

2021, the Lehigh County Board of Commissioners approved funding for all mail-in ballot postage throughout Lehigh County.

The Lehigh County Department of Human Services provides continuous, nonstop, 24/7 response and assistance to county residents and their families. Services also include continuous mental health support, de-escalation training to county law enforcement, assisting families with housing needs to help families reunite and stay out of the child welfare system, coordination with Emergency Management to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to senior and immunocompromised county citizens, and maintaining county recovery programs. Lehigh County's Office of Integrated Services continues to promote and provide cross-system training to all DHS offices and other Lehigh County offices.

Lehigh County parks became a safe haven for residents seeking relief from the pandemic, and park attendance increased dramatically since 2020. The Trexler Nature Preserve recently completed its Master Site Plan, and will have recommendations available in the Capital Plan beginning 2023-2027. Over \$21 Million in federal grant funding was received to complete an alternate two-lane roadway with an accompanying D&L Trail from Allentown's Hamilton Street to Whitehall's Race Street.

The County of Lehigh maintains a Moody's Bond Rating of Aa. The stabilization fund is maintained at \$25 Million, preserving the county's financial safety net. Lehigh County believes in effective five-year planning to manage the highs and lows of financial security. It is the goal of this planning to maintain funds only as needed, and be good stewards of taxpayer money.

Debit cards are now issued for both juror and voter's payments, reducing costs by eliminating the expense of distributing paper checks and saving Lehigh County over \$150,000 annually. The allowance of debit cards reduces the risk of check fraud and will provide further convenience for residents.

After meeting with the National Council of Counties in Washington D.C., and learning about successful healthcare and prescription cost savings, Lehigh County bid its healthcare and prescription services separately. The County of Lehigh will remain with Highmark for medical insurance, but has chosen Capital RX as the county's Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) for prescription coverage. This change is estimated to save Lehigh County from experiencing high healthcare expenses while delivering significant annual savings to the bottom line.

Lehigh County's 2022 administrative goals include the selection/implementation of a new HR software platform, reinstating HR training and development programs, the migration of all county computers to Microsoft 365, the selection of a new IT ERP fiscal/procurement system, and continued cyber security training for all county employees.

The State of County address is sponsored by Workforce Board Lehigh Valley, Lee & Associates, and the Lehigh Valley International Airport. For more information, please contact Public Information Officer, Laura Grammes at 610-782-3002.

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