

Warren County Economic Development Action Plan Matrix

November 9, 2016

CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH TETRA TECH AND CAMOIN ASSOCIATES



Executive Summary

Warren County, New Jersey is a pastoral region of Northwestern New Jersey sandwiched between Pennsylvania to the west and the New York City metropolitan area to the east. The county encompasses the southern tip of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and benefits from an abundance of other natural resources for visitors and county residents to enjoy. To build on existing resources and harness new economic development opportunities the Warren County Freeholders, in collaboration with the county's Economic Development Committee (EDC), will use this Action Plan Matrix to guide their economic development pursuits.

The Action Plan Matrix on the following pages is the culmination of extensive stakeholder engagement from May – August of 2016 and builds on the efforts already underway by the EDC and other committees. The stakeholder engagement process demonstrated that agribusiness and agritourism are two vital economic sectors within the county, but that more commercial and industrial opportunities need to be leveraged in order to attract employment and increase rates. However, the perception of a cumbersome development and permitting process is inhibiting significant development progress.

Each objective in the Action Plan Matrix should be considered a high priority in terms of building a comprehensive economic development program, however **creating and maintaining a streamlined development process**, along with **promoting an environment that demonstrates that Warren County is "Open for Business,"** are strategies that need to be immediately addressed in order to set the foundation for further objectives in the plan.

Action Plan Matrix

The strategies and objectives in the Action Plan Matrix are derived from feedback gathered at stakeholder focus groups and discussions with the EDC over the planning process. The Matrix is meant to be clear and concise, providing readers with an understanding of Warren County's goals, while also being easy to digest for a range of audiences. The plan includes concrete, actionable implementation steps that address current economic conditions throughout Warren County's municipalities, and maximize use of the county's natural and tourist assets as economic engines to increase visitors and discretionary spending in the county. The objectives and catalyzing actions are built off of a strong foundation of key economic development principles and tools that are summarized in Appendix B.

Below is a key for the timeline and resources columns in the matrix.

Timeline Key:	Immediate	0-6 Months	Resources Key:	Minimal Staff Time:	0-10 Hours/Week
	Short Term	6-12 Months		Moderate Staff Time:	10-15 Hours/Week
	Long Term	1 Year +		Significant Staff Time:	15+ Hours/Week

Strategy #1: Create and maintain a streamlined and consistent development process

This will clarify what you are willing to say "yes" to. Businesses and developers need to know exactly what to provide, when, and the duration of the process. The goal of this strategy is to improve the overall perception of the development process.

Objectives	Rationale	Catalyzing Actions	Timeline	Partners	Resources	Deliverables
Conduct an audit of the development process in the county. Target the Health, Engineering, and Planning Departments, as they are the three primary departments involved in the planning process.	The process for development is unclear and perceived as burdensome. The county has received negative feedback at different points in the development process. The goal of the audit is to uncover breakdowns in the system, why they are happening, and then act to repair the breaks to ensure a smooth and consistent process.	I. Assemble and review county rules, regulations and policies with an eye towards minimizing duplication and inconsistencies in the development process. II. Engage 1-3 municipalities to review application and permitting process targeting the responsibilities of each entity. For relevant planning processes, look to State regulations to streamline from highest level.	Immediate	Tetra Tech, Local Planning Bodies	Consultant cost	Completion of audit with recommendations to eliminate duplication and increase efficiency; Creation of implementation plan
Develop best practices and model zoning ordinances to facilitate updates to local zoning codes by municipalities to reflect economic realities.	Existing zoning codes are mismatched with the use they are intended for. Reexamining zoning codes, particularly in areas of the county that are already designated as development nodes by the Highlands Act, will help to align desired outcome with policy.	I. Complete a high level examination of local zoning and planning codes and research best practices in modern zoning codes. II. Highlight practices and examples that are working well within the municipalities. III. Create compendium of best practices for dissemination to municipalities. IV. Share and engage final product with municipalities for use as future guide.	Immediate	Tetra Tech, Camoin Associates, Municipalities, Local Planning Bodies	Consultant cost	Compendium of best practices for distribution; county facilitation of planning workshops in 1-3 municipalities presenting best practices
Based on the outcome of the previous two objectives, create an online permit and process checklist to help businesses and developers remain up to date on the progress of their permit or application.	A progression tool will show developers where their application is in the process of approval and will add a layer of consistency and transparency.	I. Coordinate with audit outcome to create a visual aid for the development and permitting process. II. Explore online tools like govpermit.com that offer online solutions to complicated permitting processes. III. Offer tutorials and similar solutions to municipalities to better coordinate the county-municipal relationship in the development process.	Short	Tetra Tech, Camoin Associates, Municipalities, Local Planning Bodies	Cost of permitting tool, consultant cost, staff training for use of permitting tool	Implement improved permitting tool
Create protocol for handling inquiries related to land use planning and economic development in the County.	This is currently being done on an ad hoc basis, which is consuming resources. Having set packages will be more efficient and offer targeted information.	I. Design staff protocol for handling inquiries - how to share, understand and respond to inquiries efficiently; set up system with single point of contact for handling inquiries. II. Build a brief guide to doing business in Warren County targeted to key audiences - ideally businesses and developers. They need to be visually appealing, provide key facts, and clearly indicate where/who they can contact for more information.	Short	Tetra Tech, Camoin Associates, Municipalities	Moderate Staff Time, consultant cost	Production and distribution of Business Guides - digital and hardcopy; Development and implementation of inquiry protocol

Strategy #2: Redefine what it means to do business in Warren County. Develop and maintain an environment that demonstrates Warren County is “Open for Business.”

Warren County needs to improve the perception of doing business in the county. Local municipalities have the greatest control over planning opportunities, so it is crucial to collaborate with local planning bodies, while also improving their internal process to lead by example.

Objectives	Rationale	Catalyzing Actions	Timeline	Partners	Resources	Deliverables
Leverage areas in the Highlands that are targeted for Economic Development Revitalization and Brownfield Redevelopment. This also involves a public education component so community buy-in is already in place when development opportunities present themselves.	While the Highlands does preclude some of Warren County from development, there are designated development nodes that can be enhanced. These areas are primed for strategic development to build on existing assets. Targeted for Economic/Downtown Revitalization and Brownfield Redevelopment: Alpha Borough, Hackettstown, Oxford Township, Phillipsburg Targeted for Infill/Mixed Use Development and Economic Sustainability: Pohatcong Township Targeted for Community Redevelopment : Lopatcong Township	I. Connect with respective municipalities to concentrate on designated areas of development and identify priority sites - particularly brownfields that are laying vacant and underutilized. II. Populate EDC Site with a tab for "Available Sites" - direct local commercial realtors to this site. III. For specific classifications of land, like brownfields, leverage existing relationships with realtors and developers to bring in targeted parties for a familiarization tour. IV. Public buy-in must be in place for development opportunities to be successful. Hold public information sessions on the benefits of development. This will help shift the perception of development in the county.	Immediate	Tetra Tech, Municipalities, Local Planning Boards	Consultant costs, Moderate - Significant Staff Time	Identification of underutilized sites; Add "Available Sites" Tab to EDC Website; Facilitation of one public/stakeholder session per quarter on land use and economic development planning; Familiarization tour led by County (with guidance from Tetra Tech)
Understand Warren County's economic development potential on a local, regional and national scale.	Analyzing current quantitative and qualitative economic data points for the county and surrounding geographies will help staff understand how to position Warren County for the future.	I. Conduct a targeted industry analysis and define top three opportunity industries for the county. II. As part of the targeted industry analysis, collaborate with agricultural industry stakeholders to support and understand needs for enhancing ability to produce and distribute value-added goods.	Short	Additional Consulting Services	Consultant costs	Completion of analysis and written recommendations for future economic opportunities
Understand and clarify the function of regional economic development efforts, looking to answer the questions WHO and HOW it will be performed.	These questions are vital to successfully carry out a suite of economic development tools, including tasks related to business attraction, retention and expansion.	I. Hold work group with EDC and other stakeholders to define possible partners in regional economic development efforts - this includes local and regional chambers from NJ and PA. II. Invite local and regional chambers to discuss future collaborations.	Short	EDC Members and Ec. Dev. Stakeholders, Local and regional chambers (NJ and PA)	Moderate-Significant Staff time	Clear work plan for conducting region-wide plan for business attraction
Establish a business visitation program to support business attraction, retention and expansion. Start by focusing on key industries including agribusiness and tourism. Build on initial experience to expand to other industries.	To strengthen the relationship between the county and local businesses, the county must engage and understand the needs of existing and potential businesses. A business visitation program will provide a mechanism for understanding what types of development (retail, commercial, industrial) will boost business, along with what programs and services can be most supportive to grow and sustain the regional economy.	I. Meet with leaders in Pohatcong to discuss their experience with business survey. From their experience, build template for survey that could be used by other municipalities who have not participated in business visitation programs. II. Use results of survey to understand local business ecosystems and drive next steps in supporting local businesses. III. Organize regular meet-ups for the business community to keep engaged, connected and understand the regional economy.	Short	EDC, Regional Economic Development Partners organization and Chambers, Municipalities, Local businesses	Moderate - Significant Staff Time	Facilitation of business meet-ups, regular networking events or other industry meetings. At least one per quarter
Track connections, leads and any contacts made between the private/public sector and maintain relationships.	Part of business attraction, retention and expansion is building relationships within the development community. Tracking these interactions and relationships with a database or other organizational tool will help to maintain contacts when opportunities arise.	I. Assign point person to be single point of contact on the EDC. II. Stay in contact and collaborate with local realtors, as they are often the first line for developers interested in property or development. Once a month, invite realtors to the EDC meeting to report on any potential connections. Additionally, include realtors in industry meet-ups to report on potential connections and opportunities.	Short	EDC Members, Local Realtors	Moderate Staff Time	Database in Excel of connections and leads available for access; Implementation of single point of contact system

Strategy #3: Build off of existing tourism assets and work to maintain quality visitor experiences within the County

Warren County's tourism and recreation assets are a defining feature of the region. Striving to differentiate the county from other areas and providing high-quality services will help build and spread a positive reputation for Warren.

Objectives	Rationale	Catalyzing Actions	Timeline	Partners	Resources	Deliverables
Coordinate tourism events within municipalities. Harness the power of individual events to make sure they have a collective impact.	While there is extensive local knowledge of the many sites and events around Warren County, it is necessary to expand the reach of marketing beyond the region to draw in visitors who may be in the Poconos or Delaware Water Gap Region.	I. Pursue greater signage opportunities on Route 80 to alert drivers of available sites. II. Hold a Bi-Monthly Tourism and Recreation Industry Group meeting to explore ways to co-market events and increase opportunities to knit assets together with the ultimate goal of extending lengths of visits and overall visitation. III. Communicate happenings and progress through Warren County Wanderings (WCW). Use WCW as prime tourism and event marketing tool.	Immediate	NJ Department of Transportation (signage), Board of Recreation Commissioners, Tourism and Recreation Stakeholders	Cost of signage, Moderate Staff Time	Signage on Route 80; At least 3 Tourism and Recreation Industry (TRI) meetings; At least 3 initiatives undertaken by TRI group; Increase in attendance at events and overall # of county visitors
Engage in renewed outreach effort to get local sites and businesses on National Geographic "Scenic, Wild Delaware River."	Having a world-wide recognized brand in Warren County's backyard is a perfect opportunity to highlight local sites - especially since businesses are able to upload their own information. However, local businesses still need to be made aware of this opportunity.	I. Market the National Geographic opportunity in Warren County Wanderings, direct business owners to the GeoTourism page which provides good directions on how to upload information. II. Keep up to date with the events offered by National Geographic that could be opportunities to network with other regional visitation partners.	Short	EDC members, Board of Recreation Commissioners	Minimal Staff Time	Number of new Warren County attractions signed up on National Geographic website - aim for at least 1 per month for the next 6 months
Further investigate the need and expected value of a defining visitor event.	The EDC needs to explore ask: What would be the value of this event? What are our goals? Could this be a regional draw? Should we collaborate with other counties or regional visitation sites?	This discussion should be tied into the Monthly Tourism and Recreation Industry Group meetings (referenced above) for evaluation.	Long	EDC members, Board of Recreation Commissioners	Moderate Staff Time	Formal memo by EDC on whether to pursue a defining event
Revisit potential for Farmer's Fairgrounds to be better used all year round.	Events at the fairground could provide opportunities for further visitation, as well as opportunities for local talent and products to be showcased.	Invite operators/owners of the grounds to a Monthly Tourism and Recreation Industry Group meeting to establish future possibilities.	Long	EDC, Board of Recreation Commissioners, Operators of Fairgrounds	Minimal Staff Time	Written recommendations on the future integration of fairgrounds into county visitation strategy

Strategy #4: Leverage existing assets in natural resources and agriculture to support industry

Natural resources and agriculture are two of the county's greatest assets as economic drivers and visitor destinations. Maintaining and improving upon already notable resources is a strategic investment in the county's future.

Objectives	Rationale	Catalyzing Actions	Timeline	Partners	Resources	Deliverables
Proactively market local agriculture products and services in the county and region. Education the public about the local farmers and food in their back yard.	The local food movement is not yet prevalent in northwestern New Jersey and exposure and education about the local food in Warren County would help the idea gain traction among locals, including restaurant owners and residents.	I. Partner with local food groups to hold educational sessions on local food offerings at high traffic public events. II. Engage local public health groups to connect local food movement to healthy communities initiatives.	Immediate	EDC members, Food Shed Alliance, local agricultural producers	Moderate Staff Time	County-facilitated public session with partner organization on local food products and local availability - at least 1 per quarter
Continue to work with Warren County Community College, Rutgers, tech schools and agricultural and natural resources stakeholders to develop a pilot agricultural sciences program with the goal of making this an education and industry collaboration.	In order to build the next generation of farmers, local programs should be offered to entice potential students from within and out of the county. Warren County's abundant agricultural resources present many opportunities for collaboration between educational institutions and existing farms.	I. Coordinate with educational entities to identify potential demand for agricultural program. II. Reach out to other regional institutions that have agricultural programs to find best practices in building agricultural curriculum. III. Integrate mentorships, internships and apprenticeships throughout the process.	Short	Rutgers Cooperative Extension of WC, Local agricultural producers, Agriculture Development Board	Moderate Staff Time	Written recommendations on viability of agricultural program at county educational institution
Support the efforts of farm incubator start-up program.	Collaboration and joint resources will create a stronger, more viable program.	Coordinate with appropriate entities to support, engage and facilitate the feasibility of the farm incubator program.	Short	Board of Recreation Commissioners, Land Preservation Office	Moderate Staff Time	Monthly check-ins with farm incubator partners on progress
Use upcoming Grow Warren Project to dive deeper into exploring necessary facilities for greater distribution opportunities in the region.	While there is an abundance of food products grown in Warren County, there are challenges distributing these goods to larger markets. Farmers markets are saturated and farmers need other outlets to distribute food.	Use Grow Warren project as launching point for exploring needed distribution facilities	Long	Land Preservation Office, local agricultural producers	Moderate Staff Time	Implementation of Grow Warren marketing recommendations

Appendix A. Community Engagement Findings

Findings from stakeholder focus groups and municipal meetings organized into opportunities and challenges.

Opportunities:

1. Two major interstates with developable land
2. Scenic beauty, natural landscape/resources
3. National Geographic partnership: Scenic, Wild Delaware River
4. Proximity to metropolitan centers
5. Local agriculture and vineyards: products, tours, events
6. Cultural centers in Hackettstown and Allamuchy
7. Outlet for Millennials that desire space and relatively affordable housing
8. Warren County Wanderings: Good existing electronic outlet for sharing Warren County events, services, and vendors

Challenges:

1. Division of population – Those that have been in Warren County and want it to remain the same and those that are newer and want to see progress
2. Public financial resource constraints
3. Lack of rental properties that target a younger demographic
4. Voice of development naysayers are always prominent
5. Informing visitors and local residents of local events, vendors
6. Lack of transportation (although there have been improvements - Route 31 bus)
7. Lack of clear, coordinated marketing efforts (although recent launch of www.explorewarren.org is moving in the right direction)
8. Development restrictions from Highlands regulations
9. Outdated zoning – lot sizes large for today's purposes
10. Multiple "layers/levels" of regulations for development, inconsistent policies across municipalities

Appendix B. Project Process

Following the project kick-off meeting with the Freeholder Director and other representatives from the EDC, Camoin Associates facilitated a day-long set of stakeholder focus group meetings in July 2016. These meetings included eight targeted stakeholder groups participating in 1-3 hour interview sessions. The stakeholder groups included representatives from:

- Recreation and Tourism
- Agriculture
- Education and Workforce Development
- Banking, Finance and Realty
- Economic Development Groups including Business Improvements Districts, Chambers of Commerce, and Non-profit Organizations
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Large Employers in Warren County
- Major Developers and Land Attorneys

These focus groups were extremely productive and demonstrated that there are latent opportunities for economic development in the county, as many participants that day presented tangible ideas for progressing economic development goals.

On August 11 and 17, 2016, Tetra Tech convened two additional meetings oriented toward municipal leaders to gather input on the economic development needs of the county. These meetings drew audiences of 10 and 30, respectively. At both meetings, attendees received a briefing on status of the project, early themes coming from stakeholder interviews held several weeks prior, examples of rural and agricultural economic development initiatives, and engaged in lively discussions surrounding the challenges, opportunities and what role the county can and should play in economic development.

A fourth meeting was conducted as a workshop to develop an Organizational Vision Statement and Set Goals. Representatives of the EDC, including the Freeholder Director, attended. This meeting served as an opportunity for Camoin to present the findings of the work conducted which were organized into the Challenges and Opportunities for the county and region reflected in Appendix A. Additionally, the group discussed the economic realities of the region and how to strategically move forward in a way that is productive yet attainable.

During the final and fifth meeting, Camoin Associates and Tetra Tech presented the Action Plan Matrix to the three Freeholders and the public at a special Freeholder Meeting on October 13, 2016. This was an opportunity for the Freeholders to react to the strategies and objectives and give their candid input into the plan. Members of the EDC were also in attendance, as were a number of members of the public.

While the planning and primary data collection phase of the project was essential to completing a relevant and valuable organizational strategy for the county, it also served as an educational tool to inform the public and encourage greater participation of communities.

Appendix C. Mission and Vision Statement

During the Organizational Vision Statement and Goal Setting workshop, information that had previously been collected was concentrated into key topics and objectives that serve as the foundation for a Vision Statement for the EDC. The Committee's existing Mission Statement was slightly edited for clarity as well and is stated below. Following the Mission Statement, which states the overarching intention of the EDC, is the Vision Statement that was created from the stakeholder input and feedback collected over the previous months. It is a view into how the county envisions its future, with the strategies outlined in the matrix serving to guide the county to make the vision a reality.

Mission Statement:

The EDC's mission is to assist the County of Warren in promoting economic development and to establish a framework to be utilized in coordinating local, state and federal efforts toward this end, with major emphasis placed on providing the basic foundation essential for sound economic growth in Warren County.

Vision Statement:

Warren County is well-known as New Jersey's Highlands region - recognized regionally and nationally for its natural resources, abundant agriculture, many active recreation options, and a high quality of life for residents, workers and businesses. People travel to Warren County from across the Northeast to attend farm and art tours, while also exploring wineries, theater productions and boundless hiking trails through the Delaware Water Gap. While building a strong agri-tourism industry, the county's tax base is diversified. Municipalities have embraced commercial and industrial development at brownfield and other opportunity sites – producing quality jobs for residents. Collaboration at the county and municipal level has led to a streamlined development and permitting process – further attracting interested partners. Local farmers remain competitive by producing value-added goods that are widely distributed through the county and beyond. Local success stories are celebrated and promote the county's business-friendly environment. The county capitalizes on their niche assets to appeal to existing residents and attract new generations of Warren County residents. Collaboration among education and business partners supports a system of lifelong learning and a well-trained workforce for tomorrow's economy.

Appendix D. Economic Development Best Practices

The following best practices were used to help guide this strategic work plan.

Key Factors Driving Local & Regional Economic Development

- Workforce, workforce, workforce!
- Quality of place – amenities, infrastructure, housing, recreation and culture, etc.
- Regional collaboration and holistic approach to economic development
- Customer service driven – permitting and approval processes, transparency, accountability
- Networks
- Complex Systems requiring adaptability rather than predictability

The following are typical tools and techniques utilized by economic development organizations to support and grow regional economies.

- Business Retention and Expansion
- Business Attraction
- Tourism and Visitation
- Workforce Development
- Business Technical Assistance
- Innovation and Entrepreneurial Support
- Quality of Place/Place-based Development
- Global Trade and Foreign Investment

As well as supporting the economic development effort through:

- Planning
- Organizing
- Implementation
- Resource Development

Factors for Economic Development Implementation Success

- Trust – internally and externally
- Process and procedures – to help build trust
- Leadership qualities – within the organization as well as among the board and stakeholders; including adaptability and leading in periods of uncertainty
- Communications and Engagement – among the board, committees, and among the many stakeholders and networks; open and active communications amongst the partners
- Building capacity – for functioning within a system composed of many networks, partnerships, alliances, and initiatives
- Adaptability – Ability to respond and adapt to changes in the external environment
- Building capacity and resources for business intelligence, working smarter – data, research, digital technologies and information resources
- Incorporating new funding models – reducing reliance on government entities
- On-going assessment and evaluation – for continual improvement and effective/efficient use of funding

Lessons from the Field

- Don't bite off more than you can chew! Break large projects into smaller digestible components based on your organization's and partners' capacity to implement
- Get comfortable making collective decisions without perfect information and predictable outcomes
- Give collaboration and engagement within region, diverse stakeholders, and the public more than lip service – design and implement together
- Market externally AND internally
- Understand what you can have impact over – i.e., at local level you can impact land-use, zoning, permitting, customer service
- Economic Developer functioning as a "Point Guard"

Appendix E. List of reports received and reviewed

Agricultural Resources (Ag-Production & Agritourism)

- Breweries: <http://ediblejersey.com/editorial/winter-2016/brew-town/>
- Farmers Fair: <http://www.warrencountyfarmersfair.org/>
- Food Shed Resiliency Plan: <http://foodshedalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/PlanDesignR1.pdf>
- Last Fling Pumpkin Sling: <http://www.pumpkinsling.com/>
- USDA Rural Business Development Grant for Strategic Growth & Marketing Plan
- Warren County Farmland Preservation Plan: http://www.co.warren.nj.us/Download/WARREN_FARMLAND_PLAN.pdf
- Warren Farm Art DeTour Project: <http://fermentationfest.com/dtour>
- Wineries: <http://www.vintagenorthjersey.com/our-wineries/>

Cultural & Heritage Resources

- Additional Historic Sites of Interest: www.rutherfurdhall.org, <https://hoffvannattafarm.org>, www.ramsaysburg.org, www.phillipsburghhistory.com/roseberry-house.html
- Morris Canal Greenway & Museums: www.warrenparks.com/morris-canal-greenway/
- New Jersey Heritage Tourism: <http://www.njht.org/dca/njht/touring/NJ%20Heritage%20Tourism%20Master%20Plan%20-%20FINAL%206-4-10.pdf> (NJ Heritage Tourism Master Plan)
- Shippen Manor Museum Warren County Cultural & Heritage Commission: www.wcchc.org

Natural Resources (Open Space and Recreation)

- 911-Trail Plan: <http://www.911trail.org/trail-map/>
- Appalachian Trail Community Designation Project: https://www.appalachiantrail.org/docs/default-document-library/at-community_application.pdf?sfvrsn=2
- Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectId=55912> <http://www.njskylands.com/parks-delaware-water-gap-national-recreation-area>
- Morris Canal 25-Year Action Plan: http://www.njtpa.org/getattachment/Planning/Subregional-Planning/2010-2012-Studies/FinalMorrisCanalGreenwayPlanRevised12_20_12.pdf.aspx
- National Geographic Wild & Scenic Delaware Region: <http://delawareriver.natgeotourism.com/>
- National Park Conservation Association's *Making Connections* Report for DWGNRA: <https://npca.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/3079/bd2d8e99-d583-435b-83b5-8d658bd0ce37.pdf?1445978650>
- Outdoor Industry Association: https://outdoorindustry.org/images/ore_reports/NJ-newjersey-outdoorrecreationeconomy-oia.pdf (outdoor recreation contributions to NJ economy)
- Warren County Open Space Plan: http://www.co.warren.nj.us/Planning/open_space_plan2008.html

Others:

- 2001 Strategic Management Plan
- US Route 22 Corridor Improvement Plan
- Strategic Growth Plan