SLATE BELT RISING COMMUNITY PLAN 2022-2028

A TIME OF CHANGE - AND OPPORTUNITY





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Slate Belt Rising (SBR), a program of Community Action Lehigh Valley, is a neighborhood revitalization initiative designed to integrate and capitalize on the substantial assets of the individual Slate Belt boroughs of Wind Gap, Pen Argyl, Bangor, and Portland. While SBR specifically targets these four boroughs, some initiatives promote development and the coordination of services for the entire region.

SBR's mission is to galvanize the boroughs of Wind Gap, Pen Argyl, Bangor, and Portland to capitalize on their shared heritage and traditions, the natural beauty of the Slate Belt, and the commercial potential provided by the proximity to major roadways in order to increase economic opportunity in the region, reduce poverty, eliminate blight, and improve the overall quality of life. SBR is in the process of concluding its initial six-year NPP, approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (PA DCED) in 2016, and has made substantial progress in fostering comprehensive community and economic development by leveraging the unique history. architecture, and culture of each municipality in the context of a regional approach. Yet the work is not vet finished.

SBR began laying the groundwork for a new sixyear plan in the summer of 2021, spearheading a comprehensive planning process which amalgamated input from residents, experts, and community partners and leaders, as well as the experience and on-the-ground knowledge that had been acquired through program implementation and responding to community needs. In so doing, a clear picture began to take shape for SBR's strategic direction and where resources needed to be focused in order to have maximum impact in the Slate Belt region. Accordingly, three interconnected focus areas were identified as the core of Slate Belt Rising Community Plan 2022-2028:



Despite being situated alongside the major thoroughfares of Interstate 80 and State Route 33, the Slate Belt has historically had difficulty in generating the same levels of investment as other areas of the Lehigh Valley region, particularly the cities of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton. While these cities have enjoyed an economic "renaissance" in recent years, the Slate Belt remains searching for similar success. There are many components that factor into creating a vibrant economic climate. The goal of this focus area is to execute projects which will ultimately contribute to the economic revitalization of the target boroughs and the Slate Belt as a whole. By providing residents with resources such as improved access to broadband internet, a commercial lease subsidy program, and youth scholarships, SBR will take a comprehensive approach toward boosting the economic well-being of the community and those in it.



The housing stock in the Slate Belt is aging and has largely fallen into disrepair as a consequence. Exacerbating the urgency of the problem is a housing affordability crisis which, even as it unfolds across the nation, has hit the Slate Belt harder than most other areas. Quality, affordable housing is a fundamental need for people and families that must be met in order for them to thrive in other areas of life and in their communities; it is critical to hedge off the worst impacts of these housing market conditions before they occur. SBR plans to improve the housing stock in the four boroughs through a targeted, high-impact approach, focusing on neighborhood blocks and giving the final boost to these areas necessary to attract outside investment. This will be accomplished through projects such as blight remediation, façade improvements, power washing, painting, weatherization, and sponsoring the installation of public murals to create livelier residential and downtown areas.



Despite being united by a common history and identity, Slate Belt municipalities have tended to approach regional problems on an individual basis, with a minimum of collaboration and communication. Similarly, area residents are often disengaged from their communities and there is a dearth of regional pride. SBR recognizes that the best way to tackle common problems is to come together, and so this focus area will address both intermunicipal and communal cohesion through project activities such as investing in the creation of regional plans; hosting community events; designing and executing a "Slate Belt Proud" initiative to increase civic participation; and enhancing the regional trail network.

SLATE BELT RISING COMMUNITY PLAN 2022-2028 will begin with the approval of a Neighborhood Partnership Program through PA DCED in 2022. SBR will leverage this funding to engage corporate, public, and private resources so that the vision of an economically prosperous, secure, resilient, thriving, cooperative, and proud community can be actualized. The goals described in this plan will be accomplished through strategic partnerships among community organizations, residents, state and local governments, public institutions, and the private and nonprofit sectors.



HISTORY OF THE SLATE BELT

Lying just south of Blue Mountain on the Kittatinny Ridge in eastern Pennsylvania, situated between the Delaware and Lehigh rivers, is a 22-square mile area that has come to be known as the Slate Belt due to its former status as the global center of the once-booming slate industry. The Lenape people were the original settlers of the land; however, having been driven out of their home by the pressures of European colonization, German settlers moved in in their wake and began farming in the region in the early 18th century. This group, called the Pennsylvania Dutch, adapted themselves to an agrarian lifestyle, working the rocky soil to support themselves and their families. It wasn't until the 1830s that a discovery was made; this very soil contained copious formations of slate rock, a material which was to become the economic backbone of the region for nearly a century.

The industrialization of slate production accelerated greatly when Robert Jones, an immigrant from Wales, moved to the area in 1848 and subsequently founded the borough of Bangor, so named after his hometown of Bangor, Wales. Upon the expansion of his operations to multiple quarry sites, Jones was met with great success, and privately owned slate quarries soon began to proliferate all over the region, spreading to Wind Gap, Pen Argyl, and beyond. Welsh and Cornish immigrants, many of whom had prior experience working in slate

quarries in their native countries, poured into the region—by now dubbed the "Slate Belt"—to take advantage of the high labor demand for "slaters."

The work of a slater was lucrative, albeit dangerous. Their primary task was to separate thin sheets of slate which lay on top of one another in folding patterns all through the formations. Due to its unique propensity for being split in this way, slate was first and foremost used to create roofing tiles, although it could alternatively be used for chalk board, countertops, and a number of other products.

Soon, slate tiles began appearing on the roofs of houses not just in the Slate Belt, but all over the state, the country, and the world. This golden age of slate production supercharged the economies of the area boroughs, and their population increased at a breakneck pace as immigrants-now primarily hailing from Italy-continued to arrive. Despite sporadic ethnic tensions that arose as a consequence of working men and families rubbing shoulders with others who spoke different languages and practiced different customs, the people were bound together by common interests and goals, as well as a common way of life. Understanding the formulation of this ethos is crucial to understanding the Slate Belt as it is today; a large majority of residents are descended from those who labored in the guarries, and many have immediate

relatives for whom it was, or even still is, their livelihood.

Production peaked in 1903, at which time over half of slate exports all over the world originated from the Slate Belt. Soon after, the region's hub status began to decline precipitously. Contributing factors to the decline included the labor supply drying up as men traveled overseas to fight in World War I; the crippling economic blow of the Great Depression in the 1930s; a transition to the use of less durable but much cheaper asphalt roofing tiles; and, simply, an exhaustion of resources. Many quarries began hitting layers of "hard tack," a nonviable substance that sounded the death knell for their economic productivity. As slate quarries shut down one by one, so, too, did the economy, as well as the community's very sense of identity. For a brief period, stability was provided by the textile and garment industries, as the Slate Belt pivoted to partially fill the void left by the collapse of the slate industry. Such businesses gained some traction, and, for several decades, were an important sustaining economic pillar. However, it was not long before these began to weaken as well. One resident put it succinctly: "since the demise of the garment industry, there [have not been] a lot of employment opportunities close to home." Currently, there are only a handful of mills, and even fewer slate quarries-three-which are still operational.

In order to regain its footing, the Slate Belt must now reinvent itself once

again. Poverty rates are persistently high, and indicators of economic prosperity for the Slate Belt boroughs lag behind many of their regional counterparts elsewhere in Northampton County. Existing small business owners are struggling to keep their establishments afloat, and there is a dearth of new small businesses. Limited, aging, and unaffordable housing stock is compounding the economic distress that is already being felt by residents, as it becomes more difficult to find quality housing at a reasonable price point. But despite the need for new development, many residents are concerned that it will crowd out or otherwise negatively affect the history, heritage, and small town charm of the region. This balancing act between economic growth and preservation can only be achieved through greater collaboration and communication between individuals. organizations, and municipalities.

In many ways, the story of the Slate Belt is the story of America—a community built by immigrants, booming and prosperous in one historical moment, struggling and searching the next. However, this has forged a spirit of resiliency in the Slate Belt and a willingness among its communities to pivot and reinvent themselves when necessary in order to thrive. Both of these characteristics will certainly be drawn upon to overcome current challenges and capitalize on shared opportunities over the next six years.

THE FOUR BOROUGHS - AN INTRODUCTION

The mission of Slate Belt Rising (SBR), a program of Community Action Lehigh Valley (CALV), is to galvanize the boroughs of Wind Gap, Pen Argyl, Bangor, and Portland to capitalize on their shared heritage and traditions, the natural beauty of the Slate Belt. and the commercial potential provided by the proximity to major roadways in order to increase economic opportunity in the region, reduce poverty, eliminate blight, and improve the overall quality of life. While these four boroughs do not adjoin, they share in the unique history. character, challenges, and potential of the Slate Belt region. This cluster of boroughs is located just south of Blue Mountain, west of the Delaware River, and east of State Route 33, and is bordered to the north by Interstate 80 and Monroe County. Together, these boroughs constitute the target area for Slate Belt Rising Community Plan 2022-2028's (SBRCP) project activities and investment. The combined population of the target area is 12,057 people.

NOTE: Unless otherwise explicitly stated, all data referenced in this plan was pulled from the American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2016-2020, collected by the US Census Bureau



(Census Tract 157) encompasses 1.37 square miles and was incorporated in 1893. It is the entrance into the Slate Belt from State Route 33 and is also known as "the Gateway to the Poconos." The "Gap" was a natural passage for Native Americans, settlers, and the military. Wind Gap was designated as an Appalachian Trail Community™ by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in 2015



(Census Tract 156) is 1.40 square miles and was incorporated in 1882. "Pen" is Celtic for "mountain" and Argyl is Greek for "slate rock." The Borough was originally part of the "Walking Purchase" of 1737. The first slate quarry opened in 1854, and the row homes and company stores followed, creating a community for the workers. There is currently one slate quarry still in operation.



(Portion of Census Tract 152.01 — Block Groups 2011, 2012, and 2013, 2015) is 1.51 square miles and was incorporated in 1865. Settled around 1760, Bangor quickly changed from a farming community to the "center of commerce" of the Slate Belt, known internationally for slate roofing, blackboards, and floor tiles. The strong Welsh heritage tied to the Borough's origins is still very evident in the historic stone walls and established gardens and other greenery.



(Southeast corner of Census Tract 183, Block Group 4) is 0.58 square miles and was incorporated in 1876. Portland has a well-defined business district and a great respect for historic preservation. Its location along the Delaware River on Route 611 and its direct pedestrian and vehicle links to New Jersey make this small borough a significant river town gateway to the Lehigh Valley and a prime location for eco-tourism.

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The Slate Belt is the northern-most region of Northampton County, Pennsylvania. It is comprised of 10 municipalities: the boroughs of Wind Gap, Pen Argyl, Bangor, Portland, Roseto, and East Bangor; and the townships of Upper Mount Bethel, Lower Mount Bethel, Washington, and Plainfield. The combined population of this 118.2 square mile area is 36,779. While the target area is just 4.1% of the geographic area of the Slate Belt, it contains 33.1% of its population with a combined population of 12,057 people.

The target area is racially and ethnically homogeneous as compared to Northampton County and Pennsylvania; its population is 92.9% white, nearly ten percentage points higher than the County rate. The Hispanic/Latino share of the population is also lower than that of the County—which has large Hispanic/Latino communities in the urban centers of Allentown and Bethlehem—and is proportionate to that of the state. Portland is a notable outlier in

this regard; over 30% of its population is Hispanic/Latino, much higher than that of any of the other boroughs.

Given the region's history as a destination for immigrants from various European countries, it is unsurprising that the population has retained that demographic fingerprint. For example, Italian immigrants came in swaths to the Slate Belt in the early 20th century to find work in slate quarries. Individuals with

Italian ancestry still represent over one-fifth of the population in the target area. Only 4% of the target area population is foreign-born, as opposed to approximately double that for the County, suggesting that immigration to the area has slowed dramatically. Lack of economic opportunity and jobs in the area are likely contributing factors.

	PA	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WIND GAP
TOTAL POPULATION	12,794,885	304,233	12,057	5,229	3,551	549	2,728
WHITE	79.4%	83.4%	92.9%	92.8%	91.2%	90%	95.7%
BLACK	11.1%	5.9%	1.1%	0%	3.5%	0.4%	0.4%
HISPANIC/LATINO	7.6%	13.7%	7.3%	8.3%	6.2%	30.2%	2.3%
ITALIAN	11.2%	14.2%	21.3%	20.1%	31.1%	12.2%	12.6%
FOREIGN BORN	7%	7.8%	4%	1.5%	3%	0.4%	10.9%

Although many Northampton County residents think of the Slate Belt as an area where the average age skews older, that perception is unwarranted. It is, in fact, comparatively youthful; the median age for residents of the four boroughs is 37, over five years less than that of the County and three years less than that of the state.



Over the years, efforts toward coordination of services have aspired to reduce costs while improving services in the region. The Slate Belt Council of Governments addresses local government concerns on a regional basis by providing a neutral forum to discuss issues of common concern. When appropriate, this organization articulates common positions on major issues and coordinates voluntary programs, services and/or utilization of municipal equipment to spread costs and increase the efficiency of service. In April 2015, the Slate Belt Regional Police Department was launched to serve a 27 square mile area of the Slate Belt including Wind Gap and Pen Argyl, as well as Plainfield Township. In 2019, the Slate Belt Council of Governments collaborated on successful proposals for the purchase of a street sweeper. sewer jetter, and a crack seal machine that will be shared by the boroughs. Each borough in the target area is currently served by its own volunteer fire company.



The Slate Belt lacks sufficient public transportation infrastructure. Only 0.7% of target area commuters take public transportation to work, versus 1.6% at the county level, likely due in part to a lack of viable options. The Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority provides reservation-based service from the Slate Belt to Northampton Community College; this service is available during limited hours from Monday through Saturday. There is also a regularly scheduled route that connects Bangor, Pen Argyl, and Wind Gap with Nazareth and Bethlehem; this bus runs every hour to two hours during traditional working hours on Monday through Saturday.



The Slate Belt is home to several brownfield sites. Many empty quarries have become dumping grounds for waste. They also attract swimmers, leading to many accidents and even deaths. One former industrial site, which was once a tire dump with more than 500,000 tires, was remediated with a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and is in the process of becoming an industrial park. Through a partnership with Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation and with funding from the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection and other private and public entities. a former railway maintenance facility in Pen Argyl borough was transformed into a 30,000 square foot regional YMCA which now provides services to over 1.100 Slate Belt residents. Many more sites offer similar potential to improve appearance. safety, and available amenities in the target area. Bangor Business Park, a 79-acre former incinerator and landfill, is one such underutilized property. A 40-acre site that straddles the borough of Portland and Upper Mount Bethel Township has been developed into commercial and industrial space with access to I-80. The location, now known as the Portland Industrial Park. houses businesses such as Ultra-Poly Corporation and will be expanding operations within the industrial park. Air Liquide maintains a presence in the Portland Industrial Park, and a new fish oil company called Marine Ingredients will be establishing a presence in the Portland area.



HISTORIC BANGOR BUSINESS ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP AREA LIMITS (SOURCE -- GOOGLE)



The Slate Belt is served by an independent chamber of commerce that promotes business growth throughout the region. There are two distinct downtown neighborhoods with a strong business district in Bangor and Portland. SBR also has a strong partnership with the Historic Bangor Business Association, a membership-based association whose members organize festivals and events to showcase the deep history and culture of the Slate Belt region. Portland is situated along the Delaware River and thus attracts many daily eco-tourists. The region is located between Interstates 78 and 80, which are connected by State Route 33; this makes the area easily accessible to nearby cities.



There are several public parks located throughout the target area. Wind Gap Park offers 25 acres of park which includes tennis courts, a playground, ball fields, basketball courts, and a bandstand. In recent months, progress has been made on a one-mile trail loop encircling the park, known as the Wind Gap Park Trail. When complete, this trail will feature ADA compliant sections so that it is accessible and enjoyable to all. There are also plans for the trail to be linked to the Plainfield Township Trail in the near future. The Appalachian Trail runs just north of Wind Gap. Weona Park in Pen Argyl includes a carousel that is on the National Register of Historic Places, a miniature golf course, a skate park, an amphitheater, a basketball court and recreational fields, picnic facilities, and a community center. There are three parks and five pocket parks in the borough of Bangor, Amenities include playgrounds, ball fields, pavilions, a pool, volleyball courts, and a train ride. Portland has a footbridge that can be used to cross the Delaware River. There is also a small pocket park in this community.

WHERE WE'VE BEEN (PROJECT HISTORY & ACCOMPLISHMENTS)

PROJECT HISTORY

In response to the lack of opportunity in the Slate Belt region, Community Action Lehigh Valley (CALV) partnered with the four Slate Belt boroughs of Bangor, Pen Argyl, Portland, and Wind Gap to develop the Slate Belt Rising Community Revitalization Plan. Using the plan as a framework, Slate Belt Rising—which became a program of CALV in 2016—applied that same year to be recognized by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development as a Neighborhood Partnership Program. After receiving approval, Slate Belt Rising (SBR) gained the distinction of being the first multi-municipal NPP ever created—a fact that holds true even to this day.

The plan development process included a group of stakeholders including community leaders, the SBR steering committee and subcommittees, the CALV board of directors, borough officials, and members of the Slate Belt community. From 2015-2016, the Pennsylvania Downtown Center conducted a community perceptions survey to gather data from community members on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the boroughs. A total of 436 individuals responded to the survey, and analysis of the information gathered served as the catalyst for the plan. As part of the plan development process, other pertinent, pre-existing local and regional plans were analyzed to ensure that SBRCP was strategically compatible with them and to identify potential collaborative projects and shared areas of focus. Taking all factors into account, five primary plan objectives were identified: Vibrant Economic Climate; Regional Cooperation; Neighborhoods and Housing; Youth Engagement; and Sustainable Slate Belt Risina.



PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through strategic partnerships, Slate Belt Rising has made significant progress in transforming the four boroughs and the Slate Belt since 2016. SBR has received recognition for its efforts by being awarded an Organizational Award of Excellence for Multi-Municipal Cooperation from the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, as well as the Governor's Award for Local Government Excellence for promoting community and economic revitalization. SBR has leveraged over \$1.4 million in public and private funds for investment in the region. These resources were used to impact the community in the following ways:



Youth initiatives such a regional field hockey program, Police Activities League and scholarships;

AN INVESTMENT OF \$25,720



Facade grants for homeowners and business owners; AN INVESTMENT OF \$135,826

LANLORD TRAININGS

and other community events;
AN INVESTMENT OF \$30,000



Regional efforts including events, branding, marketing and promotion; an investment of tens of thousands of dollars

PLANNING EFFORTS

including individual plans and the Slate Belt Regional Comprehensive Plan; AN INVESTMENT OF \$285.300



Streetscape improvements;
AN INVESTMENT OF \$191,528

Here's a more detailed breakdown of SBR's impact by the numbers:



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
PROVIDED WITH SCHOLARSHIPS
TO HELP PAY FOR COLLEGE



COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS COMPLETED, WITH FOUR MORE CURRENTLY UNDERWAY

120+

VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED THROUGH SBR



SMALL BUSINESSES ASSISTED THROUGH EVENTS AND PROGRAMS SUCH AS BUSINESS VENDOR MARKETS AND A VIRTUAL BUSINESS WALK



OWNER-OCCUPIED REHAB PROJECTS COMPLETED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CALV'S COMMUNITY ACTION HOMES



LANDLORD WORKSHOPS HOSTED WITH DOZENS OF LANDLORDS ATTENDING



YOUTH AND ADULT COMMUNITY
MEMBERS EDUCATED IN NUTRITION AND
PARTICIPATED IN THE MAINTENANCE OF
COMMUNITY GARDENS

900 + LBS

201 AFT HOMES WEATHERIZED IN PARTNERSHIP

WITH CALV'S WEATHERIZATION PROGRAM



PURCHASE OF COMPUTERS FOR A LOCAL COMMUNITY CENTER; LOCAL PARK IMPROVEMENTS INCLUDING INSTALLATION OF RAIN GARDENS AND SIGNAGE; AND MORE! When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in early 2020, SBR responded without hesitation, providing crucial support to Slate Belt communities by:



FUNDING A GIFT CERTIFICATE PROGRAM FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES THROUGH THE SLATE BELT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



DISTRIBUTING OVER 1,300 BOXES OF FRESH PRODUCE AND 1,400 FAMILY MEALS THROUGH THE SLATE BELT YMCA



PROVIDING SUPPLIES FOR THE PEN ARGYL SALVATION ARMY TO SERVE SLATE BELT RESIDENTS IN NEED, INCLUDING OVER 65 SUMMER SURVIVAL KITS 4KIDS



PROVIDING FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR AREA FOOD PANTRIES TO PURCHASE A REFRIGERATED TRAILER TO EXPAND HEALTHY FOOD OFFERINGS TO SLATE BELT RESIDENTS

Here's what the community had to say about Slate Belt Rising and the last six years:

"KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK." "I THINK THIS IS
A GREAT PROGRAM
AND WOULD LIKE
TO SEE IT CONTINUE."

"THIS IS A GREAT LITTLE
TOWN AND I'VE BEEN
ENJOYING THE AESTHETIC
IMPROVEMENTS."

"2 YEARS IN SLATE BELT SO FAR, WE LOVE IT HERE AND CAN'T WAIT TO SEE THE DOWNTOWN AREA THRIVE AGAIN." "REALLY LIKE THESE SURVEYS. APPRECIATE HAVING SOME INPUT INTO DECISIONS."

WHERE WE'RE GOING (PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS)

COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Throughout the plan development process, SBR was guided by the core belief that the best plans emerge when shaped by community feedback in every phase, from inception to implementation. When such voices are centered, not only does the end product reflect the true needs and concerns of the community, but community buy-in and participation are also greater, as people are more likely to invest their time, resources, and hearts into the causes which they care about. It also empowers individual residents and lavs a bedrock of trust upon which the plan can be executed. This sets the stage for stronger partnerships and a deeper, longer-lasting positive impact on the residents of the target area and the Slate Belt as a whole.

Operating under a community-driven neighborhood revitalization philosophy, SBR solicited feedback from three distinct groups: current steering committee and subcommittee members; prominent community members known as key stakeholders (a full definition of the term is offered below); and the community itself. Feedback was obtained from a variety of different channels-both in person and virtual—prior to the drafting of SBRCP itself, and was taken heavily into consideration by the new steering committee when determining SBRCP's focus areas and strategic goals and objectives, as well as brainstorming firstyear projects. While certain suggestions were untenable due to limitations on resources and scope, feedback was directly reflected in SBRCP and specific projects whenever possible. Deviations were

solely the result of the aforementioned limitations and the consideration that, in some instances, other entities, municipal or otherwise, were already focusing their attention on a given community need, and thus SBR's efforts were more needed elsewhere. Collectively, the input received from these three groups was one of the most important factors taken into consideration by SBR leadership and the steering committee when selecting plan focus areas and first-year project ideas. A full summary and analysis of this input can be found in Section IV of this plan, "Plan Implementation – The Next Six Years."

REVIEW OF EXISTING PLANS

A major determinant of SBRCP's collaborative potential and value, as well as its long term viability, is its integration with pre-existing community and municipal plans. Choosing complementary areas of focus helps to enhance the value of standalone projects such that, when taken together, they have a collective impact that is greater than the sum of the individual efforts. Another factor taken into consideration was the geographical proximity of the plan's area of focus with the Slate Belt area. With this in mind, the strategy and content of the following plans was centered in the plan development process for SBRCP:

- Plan Slate Belt: Issues and Opportunities Report Draft (2019)
- Pen Argyl Revitalization Plan DRAFT (2021)
- Portland Neighborhood and Redevelopment Plan (2019)

- Northampton County Consolidated Plan (2019-2023)
- Northampton County Blight Reversal and Remediation Plan (2019)
- BEAN Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (2021)
- FutureLV: The Regional Plan (2019)
- Minsi Lake Corridor Greenway & Stewardship Plan (2022)
- Northern Tier Trail Feasibility Study (2019)

A full summary and explanation of the complementarity of these plans with SBRCP may be found in Section IV of this plan, "Plan Implementation – The Next Six Years."

Although they were selected for deeper explanation due to their pertinence, regional importance, or both, the aforementioned plans do not account for an exhaustive list of all plans which were reviewed and factored into the planning process for Slate Belt Rising. The following plans were also selected and confirmed to be in alignment with SBRCP in each facet, including goals, strategies, and vision:

- Lehigh Valley Return on Environment (2014)
- Lehigh Valley Planning Commission Regional Housing Plan (2014)
- Northern Tier Trail Feasibility Study (2019)

- Livable Landscapes Northampton County (2015)
- Pen Argyl Weona Park Master Site Development Plan (2018)
- Wind Gap Park Master Plan (2016)

NOTE: Bangor does not have its own comprehensive plan. Wind Gap was included in a regional comprehensive plan along with Pen Argyl and Plainfield Twp in 2004, but due to the evolution of the region since then and the dated nature of the plan, it was not included in this analysis. Comprehensive plans for Lower Mount Bethel and Upper Mount Bethel townships were also considered but are similarly out of date.

PLAN REVIEW, APPROVAL, AND ADOPTION

SBRCP was continually reviewed and iterated on by Vincent Behe, SBR's planner; Stephen Reider, the former director of SBR; and SBR steering and subcommittee members, as well as various community stakeholders throughout its formulation. First year projects were approved by the SBRCP steering committee on April 15, 2022. The plan then went before the board of directors for Community Action Lehigh Valley, SBR's parent organization, for final review and approval. After having been approved by the CALV board of directors on May 18, 2022, the plan was considered to be officially adopted.



COVID-19

Now over two years into the pandemic, close to one million Americans have died of COVID-19. Tens of millions more have lost their jobs, their health, or their loved ones. In Northampton County, where the Slate Belt is situated, there have been 79,299 cases and 1,082 deaths as of March 29, 2022. Individuals belonging to a number of demographic categories are disproportionately represented in those that have suffered the myriad negative impacts of the pandemic and continue to struggle with recuperating from the fallout. These categories include low- to moderate-income individuals; individuals with lower levels of education; individuals whose jobs involve close contact with others and do not have a remote work option; and people of color. The first three categories are especially relevant in the Slate Belt, where median income and education levels both lag severely behind county and state averages and residents are more likely to be employed in high-risk settings.

The median household income in the target area is just \$55,039, significantly less than the median of Northampton County at \$73,088. According to a joint study conducted by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, during the initial COVID-19 outbreak, low-wage workers suffered wage and job cuts at a much higher rate than their counterparts in higher-wage positions where the pivot to remote

work was possible. In fact, high-wage employment actually increased during the first year of the pandemic, while low-wage workers lost their jobs at five times the rate of middle-wage workers. Not only did low-wage workers suffer severe impacts, but they were also more likely to have been in positions of need before the pandemic struck, and more likely to be bypassed by various forms of aid. The Urban Institute's Coronavirus Tracking Survey found that 70 percent of all adults—but only 59 percent of adults below the poverty level—had received an Economic Impact Payment by late May 2020. In the target area, the individual poverty rate is 11.5%, as opposed to the Northampton County rate of 8.6%. This means that, in the early months of the pandemic, only 6 out of 10 of all impoverished individuals in the target area had received a stimulus check. making it more challenging to purchase household necessities while keeping up on other expenses such as rent. Perhaps most concerningly, low-tomoderate income people are still feeling reverberations two years later, even after a full recovery for top earners. Jobs for low-wage earners (<\$27k) remain 29.9% below their pre-pandemic levels, while those for higher earners (>\$60k) have returned to that level (as of March 2021).

Workers in the Slate Belt tend to have less access to so-called "white collar" employment opportunities in sectors such as finance, consulting, or other professional services, and even if that were not the case.

their lower levels of education often preclude them from being considered for such opportunities. In the target area, over a third, or 35.6%, of workers are employed in the construction, manufacturing, or transportation/warehousing/utilities sectors; in Northampton County, that percentage is just over a quarter, or 26.3%. The HHS study explains that "low-wage workers are least likely to have access to paid leave to allow them to stay home if they become sick or become exposed to COVID-19." This presents a difficult, if not impossible, choice—continue working while risking your own health and that of your family, or don't work at all. The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission found that the percentage of residents at-risk of job loss-31% in Wind Gap, 29% in Bangor, 29% in Pen Argyl, and 29% in Upper Mount Bethel Township, which contains Portland-were among the highest rates in Northampton County, Additionally, target area workers are less likely to work from home (3.5%) than the Northampton County average (6.5%), further increasing their risk of exposure.

Residents of the target area are at greater risk to their personal health in addition to their financial and job stability. Data from the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission shows that 79% of workers and 80% of workers employed in Bangor and Pen Argyl Area school districts, respectively, are employed in at-risk industries. These two school districts encompass the whole of the target area. The Federal Reserve

Bank of Philadelphia characterizes at-risk jobs as "those that require employees to regularly work within six feet other employees, or customers, which increases the risk of contracting COVID-19 and their risk of job loss." Adding to the risk is the fact that low-income workers are less likely to be vaccinated against COVID-19. A Kaiser Family Foundation brief from September 2020 found that individuals with an annual income under \$40,000 had a 68 percent partial vaccination rate, compared with 79 percent for incomes \$90,000 or higher.

In addition to being more susceptible to COVID-19, low-wage workers suffer pandemic-related mental hardship as well. The HHS study also found that "while more than half of all adults say their mental health was negatively affected by pandemic-related stress, low-income adults were almost twice as likely to report major negative impacts compared to high-income adults." This can have lasting effects on an individual's psychology which may cascade into other areas of their lives, such as the continued reliance on performing in "crisis mode" and compromising executive function in the brain, which deals with processes such as planning and reflection (Psychology Today). The effect of the pandemic on mental wellbeing only compounds the mental health crisis we are currently seeing unfold around the country.

All these factors—income, employment, and health, as well as some not mentioned here—combine to form an insidious cycle of reinforcement, where those among us in the most fragile and precarious personal situations experience the heaviest impacts. While many areas of the country re-open fully and strive to recapture some sense of normalcy, it is evident that COVID-19 has split our society on two tracks-one for those who have the ability to return to business as usual, and one for those who must continue coping with the pandemic's setbacks. It is evident that the pandemic has only deepened the fissure of inequality which was already so severe even before early 2020.

While it is sometimes not prudent to speculate, it is also critical to be prepared for the worst-case scenario; if past patterns are any indication, the relative lull in cases and deaths after the Omicron wave may not last, as it is possible that a new variant emerges and continues to wreak the havoc of the previous two years. Slate Belt Rising, along with its partners, has a crucial role to play amidst the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, both in shoring up the community to make it as resilient as possible and in deploying resources in real time to help respond to the pandemic's impacts. Whatever the future may hold, we will be ready to support our community and help quide it through these difficult times.



STAGNANT ECONOMY

POVERTY AND LOWER THAN AVERAGE INCOME

Residents of the target area are disproportionately likely to be in a state of financial distress. The median household income in the target area is \$55,039, which is 25% less than the County median of \$73,088. Localized

areas of more intense income deficiency exist as well; the median household income in Wind Gap is \$48,224. The distribution, too, is more unequal, as earnings in Northampton County are significantly more top-heavy; 15.9% of Northampton County households earn \$150,000 or more yearly, as opposed

to just 4.7% of those in the target area. The inverse is also true, as the data shows that 6.3% of households in the target area earn less than \$10,000, as opposed to 3.7% in Northampton County. Once again, we see that such distress is more pronounced in certain boroughs. Income inequality is highest

in Bangor, where 6.2% of households earn \$150,000 or more yearly, yet 9.4% earn less than \$10,000 yearly. Both of these metrics are higher than the target area percentages.

	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	\$73,088	\$55,039	\$53,006	\$64,306	\$52,321	\$48,224
>\$150,000 PER YEAR	15.9%	4.7%	6.2%	4.3%	1%	3%
<\$150,000 PER YEAR	3.7%	6.3%	9.4%	2.7%	0.5%	6.2%

In Northampton County, 4.3% of the population received Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which is defined by the Social Security Administration as being "designed to help aged, blind,

and disabled people, who have little or no income; and provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter." An estimated 3.3% of the population in Northampton County

received cash public assistance and 9.8% received SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits, formerly known as Food Stamps, in the previous twelve

months. Several indicators were higher in the target boroughs, particularly in Bangor, where 14.7% of the population has received SNAP benefits in the previous twelve months.

	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
% INDIVIDUALS IN POVERTY	8.6%	11.5%	11.1%	13.9%	10.6%	9.5%
% FAMILIES IN POVERTY	5.9%	8%	7.5%	8.7%	8.3%	8%
% RECEIVING SSI	4.3%	4%	5.9%	2.7%	2%	2.5%
% RECEIVING CASH PUBLIC ASSISTANCE	3.3%	3%	2.6%	5.5%	1%	1.1%
% RECEIVING SNAP	9.8%	11.5%	14.7%	11.5%	7%	6.9%

Many other indicators show that residents of the target area are struggling to find economic prosperity, and, in many cases, struggling simply to get by. Not only are the median household income and per capita income markedly lower in the target area than in Northampton County, but the incidence of poverty is also higher. The familial poverty rate and individual poverty rate are

both higher in the target area (8% and 11.5%) than in Northampton County (5.9% and 8.6%). There are also serious downstream consequences of such conditions. For example, nearly a quarter (23.6%) of the target area population that is unemployed do not have health insurance coverage, whereas only 17% in Northampton County lack coverage. That number drops to 5.2%

when looking at employed residents of the target area. There are stark outliers in both cases; lack of health insurance coverage amongst the unemployed and the employed are is significantly more common in Pen Argyl and Portland, respectively. Risk of health complications is often more pronounced for unemployed individuals; thus, for target area residents with the highest need for

health insurance coverage, it is more unattainable. Many people will secure coverage through their employer, yet only two-thirds (67.3%) of target area residents have private health insurance coverage, as opposed to 77% of those in Northampton County. This disparity is likely due at least in part to the employment disparities in the target area as opposed to the County.

	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
% NO HEALTH INSURANCE (UNEMPLOYED)	17%	23.6%	10.2%	61.7%	0%	0%
% NO HEALTH INSURANCE (UNEMPLOYED)	5.7%	5.2%	2.6%	4.7%	32.4%	5%
% WITH PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE	77%	67.3%	59.1%	71.9%	66.8%	77%

EMPLOYMENT AND SMALL BUSINESSES

Employment is more difficult to secure in the Slate Belt than in other parts of Northampton County. For every three unemployed individuals in Northampton County, there are four unemployed individuals in the target area. The unemployment rate

is especially high in Portland, at 19.7%. Not only is it harder to find any type of job in the target area than in Northampton County as a whole, but the jobs which do exist tend to be less lucrative, leading to a lower quality of life. The median yearly earnings for workers in the target area are \$32,976, nearly \$5,000 less than the

County mark of \$37,867. Conditions are worst in Bangor, where the median worker earns over \$10,000 less than the County mark. As cost of living rises across the nation amidst inflationary pressures, that money can be the difference between being able to continue making monthly rent payments or afford community college

tuition for one's children. The civilian labor force is also a larger share of the population than in Northampton County. Therefore, not only is there a higher rate of unemployment—there are also proportionally more individuals to be unemployed.

	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE	4.6%	6%	4.8%	5.8%	19.7%	5.6%
MEDIAN WORKER EARNINGS	\$37,967	\$32,976	\$27,083	\$34,819	\$33,582	\$36,419
CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE AS % OF POPULATION	52%	52.6%	47.5%	59.9%	58.3%	51.4%

One potential contributor to the disparity in wages is the types of jobs that are available. Whereas in Northampton County, 40.4% of workers are employed in "white collar" professional roles in sectors such as management, finance, and education, these account for only 28.1% of jobs in the target area. Conversely, many more workers in the target area are employed in sectors requiring manual labor; over a third, or 35.6%, of workers are employed in the construction. manufacturing, or transportation/ warehousing/utilities sectors. In Northampton County, that percentage is just over a quarter, or 26.3%.

This lack of employment opportunities manifests in workers needing to look harder and farther for work, and their search often takes them outside of the Slate Belt. Whereas 6.9% of households in Northampton County do not have a vehicle available, that condition applies to only 5.3% of households in the target area. Rather than reflecting economic prosperity, this number is reflective of the necessity of owning a car in the Slate Belt and speaks to some more concerning possibilities. For example, many workers in the urban centers of Northampton County-Allentown, Easton, and Bethlehem—do not need

access to a vehicle, as they can instead opt for walking and biking due to the relative density of development, as well as the myriad public transportation options available. The target area is more fragmented, with greater distances separating amenities and a dearth of built infrastructure to support alternative modes of transportation such as walking or biking. In addition, of the 36 bus routes maintained by LANTA-Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority—only one directly services the Slate Belt. There is also a "flex" option, but riders must schedule their trips in advance. Additionally, target

area workers on average have a longer commute; "their mean travel time to work is 28.8 minutes, as opposed to a mean of 28 minutes for Northampton County as a whole—nearly a full minute longer, indicating that they are leaving their community to work at higher rates. Target area workers are also less likely to work from home (3.5%) than the Northampton County average (6.5%), further increasing their mean travel time to work. All these factors combine to make vehicular access a necessity rather than a luxury and speak to sub-optimal employment opportunities in the area.

	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
% OF WORKERS IN CONSTRUCTION, MANUFACTURING, TRANSPORTATION AND WAREHOUSING, AND UTILITIES	26.3%	35.6%	44.6%	27%	40.9%	31.6%
% OF WORKERS IN FINANCE, MANAGEMENT, EDUCATION, ETC.	40.4%	28.1%	23.9%	35.4%	32.3%	32.7%
% OF WORKERS WORKING FROM HOME	6.5%	3.5%	0.8%	1.4%	0%	11.9%
HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT ACCESS TO A VEHICLE	6.9%	5.3%	6.7%	2.1%	3.5%	7.1%
MEAN TRAVEL TIME TO WORK (MINUTES)	28	22.8	31.1	25.8	30.3	27.8

While there has been a continuing trend of higher countrywide commercial vacancy rates as COVID-19 accelerates the shift to remote work for many employers, the commercial vacancy rate in the target area is still abnormally high. According to data from Statista, the average nationwide office vacancy rate was 12.3% as of the first quarter

of 2022.¹ However, in the target area, that figure shoots up by ten percent to a total of 22.3%, or nearly a quarter of all commercial properties in the four boroughs. The proliferation and support of small business has effects beyond generating revenue and keeping individuals employed: it fosters a sense of community pride and place; it brings people together

in spaces to socialize; it emphasizes local character and makes an area more attractive and charming.

According to a study conducted by Local First, a nonprofit organization in Grand Rapids, MI dedicated to promoting local business, approximately \$43 out of every \$100 spent at a non-local business stays in the local economy. For every \$100 spent at local businesses, that number jumps to \$68. Therefore, by ensuring that local businesses are thriving, the broader community is kept thriving as well.

	UNITED STATES	TARGET AREA	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
VACANCY RATE FOR COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES	12.3%	22.3%	32.8%	18.3%	39.3%	5.9%

¹ https://www.statista.com/statistics/194054/us-office-vacancy-rate-forecasts-from-2010

EDUCATION

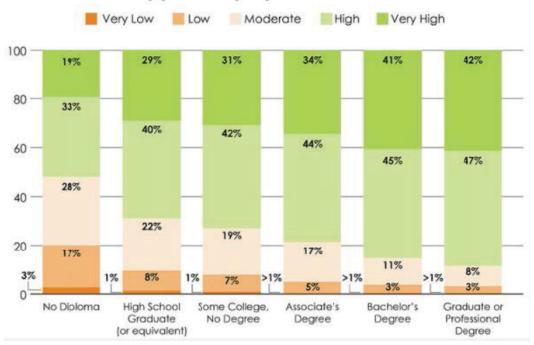
Overall, target borough residents have a lower level of education than residents of the neighboring communities. Pen Argyl and Portland both exceed the Northampton County average of adults age 25 and older who attain, at minimum, a high school level education or equivalency, with Wind Gap trailing close behind. The rate of the target area overall (87.9%) is comparable to that of Northampton County (91.3%) as well. However, the data shows a troubling divergence in higher level educational attainment, as target area residents are approximately half as likely to earn a bachelor's degree or higher as compared to

the entire county. This suggests that residents of the Slate Belt are poised to take advantage of educational opportunity but are inhibited by economic and other environmental and circumstantial barriers. Moreover, the necessity of a college degree in having access to economic opportunity is also apparent; Pen Argyl and Bangorthe boroughs with the highest and second highest rates of residents holding a bachelor's degree or higher, respectively—also have the highest median household income. College degrees have become all but essential to entering the middleclass workforce, yet the target area lags severely behind Northampton County in this crucial aspect.



	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET AREA	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE OR HIGHER (RESIDENTS 25+)	91.3%	87.9%	83.6%	91.9%	93.3%	88.7%
BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER (RESIDENTS 25+)	31.8%	17.3%	16.2%	21.9%	6.9%	15.2%
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	\$73,088	\$55,039	\$53,006	\$64,306	\$52,321	\$48,224

Access to Opportunity by Educational Attainment



SOURCE: LEHIGH VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION

One of the key predictors of wealthbuilding is educational attainment. Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for the fourth quarter of 2021 indicate that median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers age 25 and older with less than a high school diploma was \$651. The median weekly earnings for workers with a high school diploma only was \$831 per week, and the median for those with at least a bachelor's degree was \$1,467 per week, or 225% the median weekly earning of those with less than a high school diploma.² This illustrates that differences in educational attainment will result in differences in income and poverty status, which are key factors in determining the strength of a community. Reinforcing this conclusion are results from the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission's Equity Analysis, which "[evaluated] 14 data points on housing, education, transportation and employment to determine the level of access to opportunity." The analysis found that, in the Lehigh Valley region of Pennsylvania where the Slate Belt is situated, access to opportunity is dramatically correlated with educational attainment level; 86% of individuals with a bachelor's degree had "high" or "very high" access to opportunity, as compared to only 52% of individuals with no high school diploma.

Failure to close the achievement gap has real economic impacts; a report from McKinsey and Company released in 2020 estimated that, were the gap to have been bridged in 2009, today's US GDP would be \$426 to \$705 billion higher.³ Therefore, creating an economically vibrant environment in the

Slate Belt where adults and students have the resources to pursue a college education is a worthwhile endeavor, not only because it is in their best interest, but because it is in the best interest of society as a whole.

There are two school districts in the Slate Belt: Pen Argyl Area School District and Bangor Area School District. There are four elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. Together, these schools serve 4,461 students; of these, 29.8% are on free or reduced price lunch plans. In both school districts, significant percentages of students, particularly those who are from historically underperforming groups (as defined in PSSA school level data), are at a basic or below basic level in English, Math, and Science. Each

school district has a family center and Bangor Area School District has a United Way-endorsed community school initiative.

Notably, the Bangor Area School
District has a higher percentage of
students qualifying for free or reduced
lunches and a lower graduation rate
overall (85.1%) than Pen Argyl School
District (95.6%). Bangor Area School
District also has a dramatically lower
graduation rate among economically
disadvantaged students, which
is of particular concern given the
aforementioned importance of college
degrees for increased median income.
Once again, we see that individuals with
the highest need are least equipped to
address that need.

	BANGOR AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT	PEN ARGYL AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
STUDENT ENROLLMENT	2,969	1,492
STUDENTS ON FREE OR REDUCED PRICE LUNCH	30.2%	29.1%
GRADUATION RATE	85.1%	95.6%
GRADUATION RATE OF ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS	12.5%	84%

² https://www.bls.gov/charts/usual-weekly-earnings/usual-weekly-earnings-over-time-by-education.htm

https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime

COMPUTER AND BROADBAND ACCESS

The Slate Belt is, in many ways, exemplary of the "digital divide" that has only continued to grow in recent years. Stanford University defines the phenomenon as "the growing gap between the underprivileged members of society, especially the poor, rural, elderly, and handicapped portion of the population who do not have access to computers or the internet; and the wealthy, middle-class, and young Americans living in urban and

suburban areas who have access." In the digital age, access to high speed internet and other technologies is transforming steadily from a luxury good into a necessity.

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare many of the disadvantages faced by those without access to a computer or high-speed internet. According to the Pew Research Center, 90% of U.S. adults said that the internet has been "essential or important" for them during the pandemic, yet

low-income and rural areas—both of which characterize the Slate Belt—are less likely to have adequate internet access.⁴ For school-age children who had to adapt when their schools shifted to a remote learning model, unreliable or no internet access often meant difficulty accessing instructions, class materials, or getting homework turned in on time, which sometimes manifested in giving up; according to a survey from the advocacy group ParentsTogether, 70% of children in low-income households participated in

distance learning activities offered by their schools at least once per week, compared to over 95% for children whose households have a gross income of greater than \$100,000. This "homework gap" means that children already in disadvantageous positions are thus more likely to have fallen behind even further in their schooling, jeopardizing any potential pathways to college, wealth-building, and breaking the cycle of poverty.

	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET AREA	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
% OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH A COMPUTER	90.1%	89.3%	88.2%	91.6%	94.5%	87.5%
% OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH BROADBAND INTERNET	84.9%	81.2%	77%	85.7%	85.6%	82.3%
% OF HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT AN INTERNET SUBSRIPTION (INCOME <\$20,000)	49.6%	60.1%	62.6%	72.6%	42.1%	44.8%

⁴ https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/09/01/the-internet-and-the-pandemic/

In the target area, residents are less likely to have access to either a computer or broadband internet than the average Northampton County resident. Additionally, while lowincome individuals are already less

likely to be able to afford an internet subscription, in the target area, those who make less than \$20,000 a year are lacking an internet subscription at a greater rate (60.1%) than Northampton County residents with the same level of income (49.6%). This speaks to the importance not just of income, but of infrastructure in providing residents with reliable, high-speed internet. Deprivation of technology, such as internet access and a computer, sets

residents up for an economic domino effect that has the potential to impact their education and earning potential later in life. It is therefore crucial that the problem be addressed at its earliest stages.

CONCLUSION

Poverty and income levels; small business and employment opportunities; education; broadband and computer access; these can make or break the economic vitality of any region. Dramatic investments are needed in all four areas to transform the Slate Belt and the target boroughs into desirable, modern communities where each and every resident has access to the resources necessary to pursue their chosen life and career goals. Oftentimes, economic breakthroughs can occur in an area with the implementation of several small-scale, coordinated initiatives that generate momentum by building community buy-in and excitement among residents that then translate to greater investment from within and outside of the area. This is what Slate Belt Rising hopes to achieve through its efforts in the target area.



UNAFFORDABLE, AGING, AND DETERIORATING HOUSING STOCK

HOUSING AGE AND CONDITIONS

Housing options in the target area are consistently older, contain fewer amenities, and generally of poorer quality than those in surrounding Northampton County municipalities. It is a primary cause for concern and detracts significantly from the quality of life standard for those residing in

the target area, particularly low- to moderate-income individuals.

There are 5,284 total housing units in the target area. Of these, just 58.1% are owner-occupied, which lags markedly behind the Northampton County rate of 71.2%. Data suggest that median income plays a major role in the owner-occupied rate of a

given area; hence why the target area has a lower owner-occupied rate than Northampton County, and why Pen Argyl—the borough with the highest median household income of \$64,306—also has the highest owner-occupied rate of the four boroughs at 68.7%, which is almost in line with that of the County. Similarly, Pen Argyl has by far the lowest percentage of vacant

housing units of the target boroughs at 3.4%, whereas the average percentage of the target area is 11.1%. Portland has both the highest percentage of vacant housing units and the lowest percentage of owner-occupied units, suggesting a possible inverse relationship between housing vacancy and owner occupancy rates.

	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
HOUSING UNITS	123,556	5,284	2,723	1,407	267	1,337
% VACANT HOUSING UNITS	6.7%	11.1%	14.2%	3.4%	24.7%	11.3%
OWNER-OPERATED	71.2%	58.1%	52.9%	68.7%	37.3%	57.9%
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	\$73,088	\$55,039	\$53,006	\$53,006	\$52,321	\$48,224

The difference of the housing stock in the target area versus that of Northampton County in both age and quality is stark. In the target area, 51.9% of homes were built before 1940 and 84% were built before 1970, as compared to Northampton County, where 27.2% of units were built before 1940 and 51.5% of units were built before 1970. Aging housing stock is a particularly pressing issue in

Portland, where an alarming 80.1% of total housing units were constructed prior to 1940. Given this context, it is not surprising that new construction has been all but nonexistent in recent years; only 3.4% of the target area's housing units were constructed in 2000 or later, whereas Northampton County has constructed 16.3% of its current housing units since that time. Only 0.7% of housing units in the

target area were constructed after 2010, which is less than one-sixth of the County rate (4.4%). Two out of the four boroughs—Bangor and Pen Argyl—have had no new housing units at all constructed since 2000. The age of the housing stock in the target area also portends problems with infrastructure and the quality of the housing itself, as many properties have fallen into disrepair.

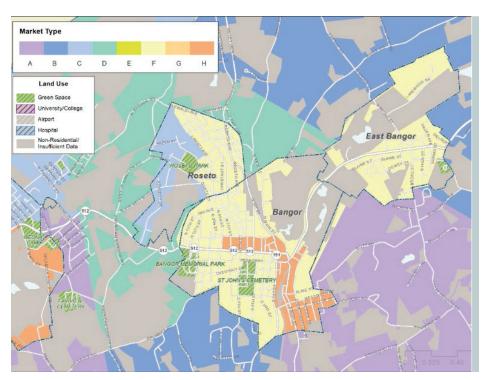
A non-negligible portion of housing units in the borough lack complete plumbing and kitchen facilities (0.3% and 1.4%), and some do not have any telephone service available (1.4%). Each of these percentages is either in line with or greater than the County average. For the individuals who do not have access to such basic services, it can be a significant barrier in daily life.

	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
HOUSING UNITS BUILT BEFORE 1940	27.2%	51.9%	52%	64.9%	80.1%	32.3%
HOUSING UNITS BUILT BEFORE 1970	51.5%	84%	89.4%	86.7%	85.3%	71.6%
HOUSING UNITS BUILT SINCE 2010	4.4%	0.7%	0%	0%	5.6%	1.5%
LACKING COMPLETE PLUMBING FACILITIES	0.3%	0.3%	0%	1.1%	0%	0%
LACKING COMPLETE KITCHEN FACILITIES	1.3%	1.4%	0%	1.1%	0%	4.3%
NO TELEPHONE SERVICE AVAILABLE	1%	1.4%	1%	0.8%	0%	3%

A Market Value Analysis (MVA) conducted by Northampton County in 2019 confirmed that blight and distressed housing conditions are present at high levels across the four target boroughs. The MVA scored markets on a letter scale, A-H, by

census block group, with A indicating the strongest, highest-quality housing markets, and H indicating "distressed" markets with low-quality housing and severely diminished property values. Throughout the four boroughs, no block groups were

classified as type A markets, or even type B; the highest classification for any block groups was type C, characterized as "generally steady" areas. There were sizable clusters of type H housing located in both Bangor and Pen Argyl. These markets "represent the most stressed block groups in the county" and "have the highest rate of distressed residential properties (18%) in the county along with estimated vacancy rates about twice the county average."



MARKET VALUE ANALYSIS FOR BANGOR BOROUGH (SOURCE - NORTHAMPTON COUNTY)

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020, housing affordability in Northampton County has rapidly escalated from a regional concern to a crisis, and the Slate Belt is no exception. Despite home values that are generally more depressed than those in the surrounding area, Slate Belt communities have nevertheless been swept up in the ongoing nationwide trend of sharply rising median home sale prices. Indeed, the Slate Belt has proven to be a focal point in the market, as families seek precisely the attractive qualities which its communities offer-relative

seclusion combined with accessibility of major thoroughfares which make for an easy commute to urban hubs.

Home values in the target area tend to be significantly lower than those in surrounding communities. Nearly three-quarters (72.9%) of owner-occupied homes in the four boroughs have a value of less than \$200,000, compared to just 42% in Northampton County. The median value of housing units in the target area reflects this disparity, as it is more than \$60,000 less than the median value for Northampton County.

	NORTHAMPTON County	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
HOUSING UNITS (OWNER OCC.)	123,556	5,284	2,273	1,407	267	1,337
UNIT VALUE <\$200,000 (OWNER OCC.)	42%	72.9%	78%	73.8%	72%	64%
MEDIAN UNIT VALUE	\$223,800	\$159,600	\$147,000	\$156,900	\$177,100	\$180,200

However, because the housing market is so volatile and prices have increased at an unprecedently sharp rate, data from the most recent American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, which spans the period of 2016-2020, does not provide the most current picture of market conditions. While these data

are still valuable, other metrics can provide a supplementary look at onthe-ground realities as they are at the time of this application. Zillow's Home Value Index, for which data is released on a monthly basis, not only indicates that home prices have been rising in Northampton County and the target

area alike, but that they are rising more rapidly for the target area in relation to the County. Whereas at the beginning of the pandemic (February 2020), the median home value in the target area was 88.6% of the median home value in Northampton County, by February 2022 that number had risen to 90%. In other

words, the median value of homes in the target area is "catching up" to that of Northampton County. Wind Gap is the only borough whose price percentage increase did not exceed that of the County during this time period.

	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
FEBRUARY 2020	\$219,000	\$194,000	\$191,000	\$178,000	\$161,000	\$224,000
FEBRUARY 2022	\$292,000	\$263,000	\$264,000	\$242,000	\$223,000	\$297,000
% INCREASE	25%	26.2%	27.7%	26.4%	27.8%	24.6%
HOUSING UNITS	123,556	5,284	2,273	1,407	267	1,337

SOURCE: ZILLOW HOME VALUE INDEX MONTHLY DATA AND AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY FIVE-YEAR ESTIMATES (2016-2020)⁵

While this phenomenon may prove to be a boon to those in the area who are already homeowners due to the appreciation of their assets and consequent increase in wealth, it has the effect of pricing lower-income individuals out of the market who can't compete with more affluent potential buyers in aggressive bidding wars. Skyrocketing home prices become all the more concerning

when viewed in context with the owner-occupied rate in the target area (58.1%), which is much lower than that of Northampton County (71.2%). This means that a larger proportion of individuals are on the outside looking in as their aspirations of homeownership become less attainable. It is also important not to just pay attention to gross dollar value of homes, but to view it

through the lens of each household's income—in other words, their ability to afford that home. For example, the median household income in Northampton County is 25% of the median home value. Therefore, for the median household, it would take four years of income to pay off a home, notwithstanding mortgage rates and other complicating factors. However, in the target area, the

median household income is only about one-fifth (20.9%) of the median home value. Therefore, it would take five years' worth of income to pay off a home, a full extra year when compared to the County median. Not only have housing prices in the target area objectively increased at a higher rate, but they have become comparatively less affordable as well.

⁵ Values for the target area were calculated using the total number of owner-occupied units

	NORTHAMPTON County	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	\$73,088	\$55,039	\$53,006	\$64,306	\$52,321	\$48,224
MEDIAN HOUSING UNIT VALUE (ZILLOW)	\$292,000	\$263,000	\$264,000	\$242,000	\$223,000	\$297,000
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME AS A PERCENTAGE OF MEDIAN HOUSING UNIT VALUE	25%	20.9%	20.1%	26.6%	23.5%	16.2%

A failure of supply to meet demand also places upward pressure on housing prices. Plan Slate Belt, a regional comprehensive planning effort undertaken by Slate Belt Rising in partnership with the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) and others, found that, in order to keep pace with projected population growth in all 10 Slate Belt municipalities, an additional 5,532 units of housing would need to be constructed in the next 20 years. According to an analysis of housing units in the Lehigh Valley conducted by LVPC,

there is an excess of housing stock whose price is appropriate for earners whose income is between \$25,000-\$99,999 yearly, and a shortage of housing stock whose price is appropriate for earners on either side of that bracket (\$24,999 or less/\$100,000 or more). This has created a "squeeze" on the market as low-income earners are forced to buy up and high-income earners are forced to buy down, inflating prices as realtors look to obtain the most lucrative offer.

Such stressors, exacerbated by the

COVID-19 pandemic, represent an additional burden on homeowners in the target area who were already more likely to be struggling to meet payments than their counterparts in other areas of Northampton County. Among homeowners with and without a mortgage, 29.8% and 25.9% are cost-burdened, a classification defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as those "who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing" and "may have difficulty affording necessities such

as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care." In comparison, just 25% and 16.1% of County homeowners in the same categories were cost burdened. Notably, the percentage of cost-burdened homeowners with a mortgage is significantly higher in Wind Gap, which also has the highest median housing unit value per Zillow data, which would seemingly corroborate LVPC's finding that lower income individuals are being forced to buy up outside of their price range in order to find housing.

	NORTHAMPTON COUNTY	TARGET AREA	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
% COST-BURDENED HOMEOWNERS WITH A MORTGAGE	25%	29.8%	25%	23.3%	37.5%	48.4%
% COST-BURDENED HOMEOWNERS WITHOUT A MORTGAGE	16.1%	25.9%	22.8%	31.3%	41.2%	23.4%
% COST-BURDENED RENTERS	49.2%	43.9%	46%	39.8%	43.7%	43.3%

The housing market does not exist in isolation; rented units comprise 42.1% of occupied housing units in the target area—much higher than the County rate of 28.8%—and the affordability crisis is impacting renters as well. About 44% of renters in the target boroughs are cost-burdened, and there is a

particularly high percentage of costburdened renters in Bangor (46%). The Small Area Fair Market Rent (SAFMR) is a metric used by HUD to determine eligibility for the Section 8 housing voucher program at the zip code level, which is more granular than the regular Fair Market Rent (FMR). The SAFMR shows for each of the target boroughs and the target area as a whole that, despite the gross cost being less than that of Northampton County, the SAFMR still represents a larger percentage of median household income in each of the four boroughs. Therefore, while the cost is objectively less, it poses a greater

burden proportionally to renters in the target area. A head of household would have to work approximately 3 full-time jobs at minimum wage to afford a 2-bedroom SAFMR apartment.

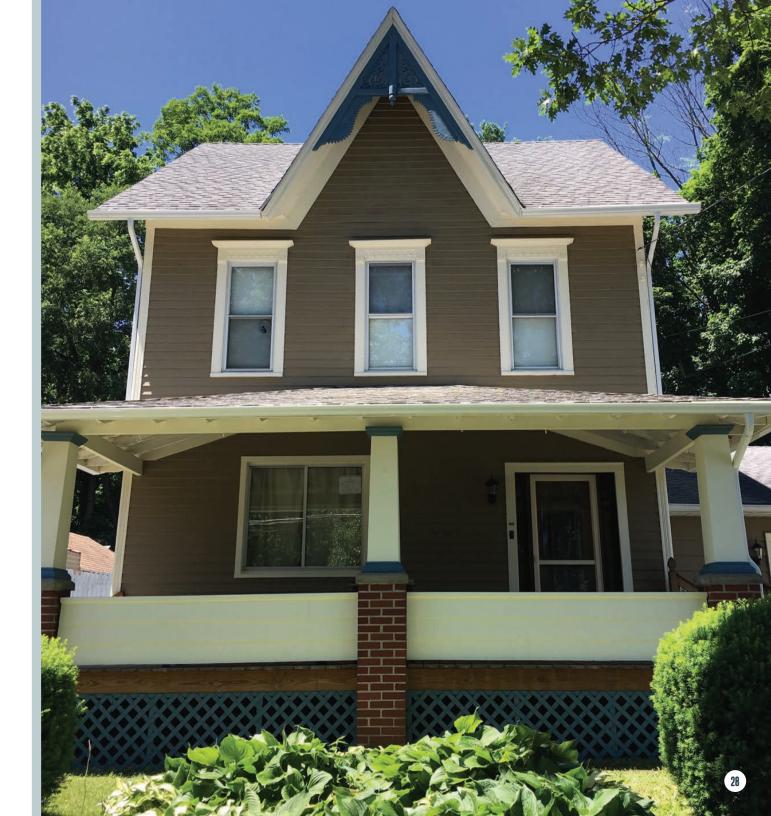
	NORTHAMPTON County	TARGET Area	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
FMR FOR TWO BEDROOM APARTMENT	\$1,196	\$1,14366	\$1,190	\$1,170	\$1,160	\$1,030
FMR AS % OF MEDIAN INCOME	1.6%	2.1%	2.2%	1.8%	2.2%	2.1%
% COST-BURDENED RENTERS	49.2%	43.9%	46%	39.8%	43.7%	43.3%

⁶ Values for the target area were calculated using the total number of renter-occupied units



CONCLUSION

Ensuring access to affordable, quality housing to all residents of the target area is a challenge that is currently just as intractable and daunting as ever. Housing markets are complex ecosystems which respond to and are influenced by an extensive list of local, national, and even global variables. However, Slate Belt Rising recognizes that perfection is an aspiration rather than a destination. We are dedicated to improving housing quality and affordability in the target area, one borough, one unit, and one family at a time. We will continue striving, along with our partners, to meet the housing needs of residents in order to provide each individual with the dignity and quality of life that they deserve.



REGIONAL FRAGMENTATION AND COMMUNITY DISENGAGEMENT

The Slate Belt is a collection of small boroughs and townships that are united by a community identity; yet, each municipality struggles on its own to provide services that both meet the needs of residents and attract new residents and businesses to their communities. The Brookings Institute's

report Back to Prosperity: A Competitive Agenda for Renewing Pennsylvania, stated that, "the intense localism of the state's 2,566 municipalities...has often caused Pennsylvania jurisdictions to compete against each other rather than act together on tough problems like land-use planning and economic

development." In the Slate Belt, some inroads have been made to address this competitiveness. In April 2015, a new Slate Belt Regional Police Department was formed, serving two of the four target boroughs, and now serves as a model for how smaller municipalities can improve service and reduce

inequities while conserving resources through coordination of effort. Yet, other services in the target boroughs remain fragmented and most planning occurs on a municipal, rather than regional, scale. The chart below demonstrates the discrepancies in size and services provided among the four boroughs.

	BANGOR	PEN ARGYL	PORTLAND	WINDGAP
FIRE COMPANY	Volunteer (3)	Volunteer (1)	Volunteer (1)	Volunteer (1)
POLICE COMPANY	Municipal	Regional	Municipal	Regional
FULL TIME EMPLOYEES	18	9	0	5
PART TIME EMPLOYEES	10	1	8	10
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN	No	Yes (with Wind Gap)	Yes	Yes (with Pen Argyl)
ZONING ORDINANCE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PLANNING COMMISSION	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UNIFORM COMMERCIAL CODE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TOTAL ASSETS AND OTHER DEBITS	\$4,850,382	\$39,654,288	\$7,166,237	\$9,416,321
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND OTHER CREDITS	\$1,998,600	\$6,575,702	\$1,678,059	\$2,475,963
TOTAL REVENUES	\$3,884,400	\$9,316,344	\$876,693	\$4,797,161
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$3,090,905	\$8,983,774	\$840,211	\$4,930,656
GAIN/(LOSS)	\$793,495	\$332,570	\$36,482	(\$133,495)

SOURCE: PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, MUNICIPAL STATISTICS, 2020

Also contributing to the fragmentation of the region is a lack of community engagement. During the planning process for SBR's initial NPP in late 2015 and early 2016, an extensive survey was conducted by the Pennsylvania Downtown Center to gauge residents' attitudes toward their downtown areas. Fifteen of the 44 survey questions, or 34%, received an undecided response. This indecision points to communities that may be in transition full of opportunity but also sharing the possibility of decline or in need of some improvement, however in this case uncertainty can also be an indication of a lack of awareness or a perceived disconnect to the revitalization effort in the communities. It can also indicate that a revitalization effort is never finished - it is an ever-changing endeavor that needs to reexamine its strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

SBR has made great progress among the target boroughs in encouraging collaboration, as well as with the community in providing opportunities for engagement in which residents can meet their neighbors, foster a sense of togetherness, and feel a part of a whole. Ordinarily, this can be challenging given the boroughs' separate services and infrastructure. However, there is still work to be done. Feedback gathered from the key stakeholder interviews and community survey for the Slate Belt Rising Community Plan 2022-2028 show that community engagement remains a persistent issue. When asked the question "What, if anything, do you think the residents and businesses in the Slate Belt can do to make this community a better place to live or visit?" residents prioritized both community engagement and cooperation between the boroughs.

Continually finding ways to nurture civic pride, provide opportunities for residents to stay engaged and informed, and develop new areas of partnership between the boroughs will be a crucial aspect of bringing about a resilient and dynamic Slate Belt community.

"CREATE MORE UNITY BETWEEN THE BOROUGHS."

"CONTINUE TO ENGAGE WITH EACH OTHER VIA COMMUNITY EVENTS."

EXAMPLES ARE

"BECOME MORE INVOLVED WITH PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE."

"BE RESPECTFUL AND KIND TO ONE ANOTHER. EXTEND COURTESY WHENEVER POSSIBLE."

"LARGER COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT."

"TRUST AND COMMUNICATION AMONG MUNICIPALITIES."

"COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT IS A GREAT
THING TO PRIORITIZE."

"CIVIC MINDEDNESS
AND BEING AWARE OF WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE COMMUNITY."

AT THE STAKEHOLDER LEVEL, THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO LISTED AS PRIORITIES:

"GETTING INDIVIDUALS TO BE INVOLVED IN IMPROVING THE CHARACTER OF THEIR COMMUNITIES."

"GETTING THE COMMUNITY
TO COME TOGETHER AND
GETTING SUPPORT IS KEY.
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
AND INVOLVEMENT IS SO
MPORTANT FOR THE FUTURE."

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION THE NEXT SIX YEARS

VISION

SBR envisions a Slate Belt in which:

- All residents, regardless of socioeconomic background, have access to the opportunities which they wish to pursue, and the resources to take advantage of those opportunities.
- All residents have a strong sense of place and pride in being from the Slate Belt, as well as for their individual municipalities.
- All residents are empowered to believe that they can make a difference, which manifests in greater community and civic involvement.
- Communication occurs constantly and efficiently between municipalities, community organizations, individuals, and other stakeholders, generating collaboration and momentum behind community betterment efforts.
- Innovation and forward-thinking solutions are boldly embraced as tools for enhancing quality of life in the community, even as the unique heritage and character of the area is cherished and preserved.
- Present challenges are looked upon as future opportunities.
- There is recognition that no problem is insurmountable when it is tackled collectively.

Here is what the residents of the Slate Belt had to say about the type of community in which they want to live:

- "Be open to innovation it is not always a bad thing to change something that has been around a long time. Open to new cultural experiences or ways of life."
- "Make [the Slate Belt] more inviting to outsiders, have more community events more frequently, create more unity between the boroughs."
- "Larger community participation and stakeholder involvement."
- "Our area could easily be the next New Hope...So when someone new is driving by they say "Oh, what's in there?!". That's what we need more of in this area. But everyone's efforts the last few years has been a good start."
- "Be respectful and kind to one another. Extend courtesy whenever possible."
- "I would like to see more businesses come into the area to make it a place to visit."
- "Continue to beautify the downtown area. It has improved so much!"



SBR'S IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR SLATE BELT RISING COMMUNITY PLAN 2022-2028 (SBRCP) CAN BE SUMMARIZED BY TWO AREAS OF EMPHASIS:



This shift in thinking is best described by the adage to "dig deep, not wide." Whereas the first NPP cast a broad net and was ambitious— and often successful—in taking on projects in different corners of the community and economic development spheres, SBR now has the ability to take six years of learned experience, as well as feedback from the community, and leverage that by investing its resources more intensely into fewer project areas. This will enable us to have a greater impact in the areas of highest community need.



In the previous plan, SBR cultivated strong partnerships with a diversity of community organizations both within and outside of the Slate Belt in order to work together toward shared goals. It is a core philosophy of SBRCP, ensconced in the "Regional Cooperation and Community Engagement" focus area. In implementing SBRCP, SBR will, first and foremost, look to maintain current partnerships and forge additional ones, particularly with organizations working in spaces relevant to potential new SBR projects such as broadband connectivity, blight remediation, and weatherization. A more expansive list of current and potential partners is included later in this section.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS PLANS PLAN SLATE BELT: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES REPORT DRAFT (2019)

SUMMARY

The Issues and Opportunities Report (IOR) is being developed by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission in partnership with Slate Belt Rising, Community Action Lehigh Valley, and all ten Slate Belt municipalities. The report will serve as a foundation for a forthcoming multi-municipal plan titled Plan Slate Belt that will serve to inform future growth, development, and preservation, and encourage inter-municipal collaboration on shared goals. Due to disruption caused by unforeseeable forces such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the planning process is still ongoing; however, the completed plan is scheduled for release in Fall 2022. In the interim, a draft of the goals, policies, and actions resulting from the plan was released in January 2022.

The report analyzes a plethora of demographic and other data to take stock of community needs and assets across the Slate Belt region, thereby building a base of information through which community concerns may be identified. The major categories of analysis in the report are Demographic, Housing, Land, Economic, Development, and Transportation.

Due to the highly collaborative and visible nature of the Plan Slate Belt initiative, as well as its potential to impact the Slate Belt for years to come, it was critical that the Issues and Opportunity Report and all related efforts be examined for compatibility and synergy with SBRCP. In so doing, key overlapping focus areas and common goals were identified, which may be found below.

COMPATIBILITY

The following policies, pulled directly from the Issues and Opportunities Report goals, policies, and actions, are listed under the SBRCP area with which they dovetail to the greatest extent:

- · Vibrant Economic Climate
 - Policy 2.1: Provide economic revitalization through support of redevelopment opportunities in downtowns and along main corridors
 - Policy 2.2: Strengthen the economy of the Slate Belt with a focus on the evolving needs of business and community

- Quality, Affordable Housing
- Policy 2.3: Improve and maintain the condition of existing development in the Slate Belt area
 - Policy 2.4: Maintain the existing character of Slate Belt neighborhoods while increasing attainable housing opportunities for all residents.
- Regional Cooperation and Community Engagement
 - Policy 3.2: Provide sustainable and efficient community services.



PEN ARGYL REVITALIZATION PLAN DRAFT (2021)

SUMMARY

According to the plan itself, it "combines elements from comprehensive plans and cultural landscape plans to recognize unique Borough character, historical artifacts, and cultural assets – combined with targeted economic and market improvement strategies." Slate Belt Rising is listed by the Borough as an official partner in the plan, and thus will be working with the Borough to leverage shared strengths and resources toward common goals.

COMPATIBILITY

The goals of the plan broadly encompass all aspects of the Portland community, including infrastructure, culture, economics and business development, recreation, environmental protection, community growth and cooperation, and more. SBRCP is synchronous with all goals and objectives laid out in this plan. In particular, it will advance the following goals from the Portland plan:

- Goal 1: Foster Sustainable Economic Development
- Goal 2: Maintain Community Character and Enable Appropriate Growth
- · Goal 3: Market Cultural Heritage



PORTLAND NEIGHBORHOOD AND REDEVELOPMENT PLAN (2019)

SUMMARY

This plan was developed based on an evaluation of current conditions in the Borough of Portland, including a SWOT—Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats—analysis. Using this analysis, plan developers laid out a vision for the Borough which included project ideas and policy recommendations, as well as an action item agenda with specific steps to implement those recommendations.

COMPATIBILITY

The plan intentionally includes many areas of potential collaboration with Slate Belt Rising. In fact, Slate Belt Rising is explicitly listed as a necessary partner for achieving the goals of the plan. Likely areas of cooperation include: a strategy to increase homeownership; housing development and redevelopment; regional cooperation; and business and commercial development. There are also specific projects that are listed in the plan which are similar to projects completed in SBR's most recent NPP, including: Signage; Tourism Brochure; Community Business Workshop; and Streetscape Improvements.



NORTHAMPTON COUNTY CONSOLIDATED PLAN (2019-2023)

SUMMARY

The Northampton County Consolidated Plan, released every five years, lays out priorities and strategies for addressing issues of economic development, community development, and affordable housing at the county level. The 2019-2023 plan places particular emphasis on affordable housing, which is a major need in Northampton County, including the Slate Belt area. The Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice, developed through a partnership between the major Northampton County municipalities of Bethlehem, Easton, Allentown, and the County itself, reaffirmed the urgent need for fair and affordable public housing in the region. In general, both plans found that there was a dearth of housing in the County, and the housing that already exists tends to be older and in relatively poor condition on average.

COMPATIBILITY

The priority need identified in the Consolidated Plan that "There is a need for decent, safe, sanitary, and affordable housing for homebuyers, homeowners, and renters" is compatible with all housing-related goals in SBRCP. In particular, Goal HS-3 Housing Rehabilitation from the Consolidated Plan is a goal which was addressed in the previous SBR plan and will continue to be advanced in the implementation of SBRCP. Both community and economic development needs as stated in the Consolidated Plan—"There is a need to improve the community facilities, infrastructure, public services, and quality of life in the County" and "There is a need to encourage employment and to promote economic opportunities in the County," respectively—are also compatible with the goals of SBRCP.



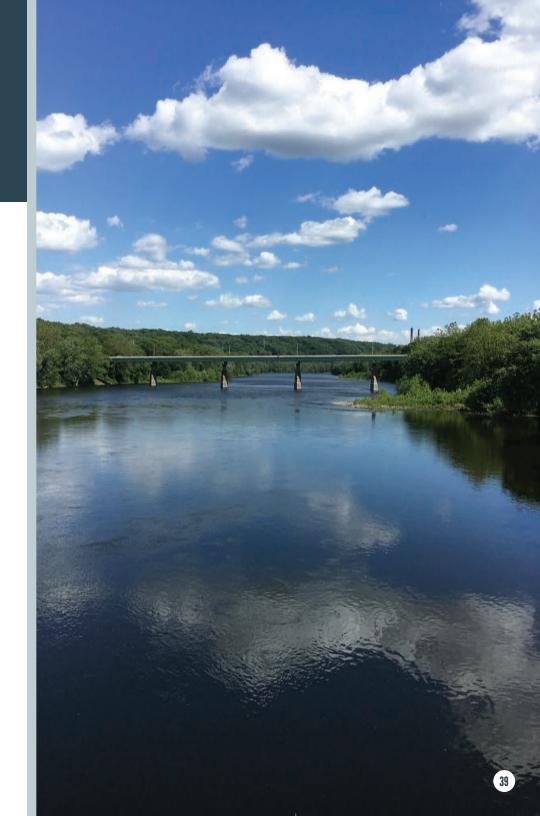
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY BLIGHT REVERSAL AND REMEDIATION PLAN (2019)

SUMMARY

This plan was the product of a collaboration between Northampton County and the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) to understand on-the-ground conditions of blight throughout the County, analyze those conditions, and recommend tools and strategies to ameliorate blight. In so doing, they solicited expert feedback and engaged stakeholders to provide a comprehensive picture of what types of interventions were most needed. A County-wide Market Value Analysis (MVA) was also conducted to pinpoint particularly distressed communities. Along with its strategic recommendations, the plan also lists available resources to help fund these recommendations and put them into practice.

COMPATIBILITY

The MVA revealed that the Slate Belt is home to some of the most distressed markets in the County. Through SBRCP, SBR will have a key role to play—as a facilitator, leader, and partner—in implementing strategies to transform persistent pockets of blight into safe, attractive, and vibrant stretches, SBR and the County are longtime partners in addressing the quality of housing stock and other properties in the Slate Belt through façade improvement projects, among other things. SBR and the County will continue and expand on this partnership over the next six years, tackling housing rehabilitation through a comprehensive approach designed to reverse blight and consequently improve the quality of life in the target boroughs. Specific recommendations from the Blight Reversal and Remediation Plan which SBR will be investigating include laying the groundwork for and subsequently hiring a regional code enforcement officer for the boroughs.



BEAN ANALYSIS OF IMPEDIMENTS TO FAIR HOUSING CHOICE (2021)

SUMMARY

This extensive analysis was conducted by the four municipal entities of Bethlehem, Allentown, Easton, and Northampton County (BEAN) to attain a greater understanding of area housing conditions, reach a consensus on existing impediments, and develop goals 808 of the Fair Housing Act to affirmatively further fair housing choice due to its status as a federal entitlement community for the CDBG and HOME programs.

COMPATIBILITY

Key findings relevant to SBRCP include:

- The housing stock in the Lehigh Valley is older and inneed of rehabilitation.
- Households incomes have increased at slower rates than housing costs.
- There is a lack of new housing construction to meet housing demand.
- Many areas of overlap exist between the priorities and suggested courses of action of the BEAN analysis and SBRCP. The following goals from the BEAN analysis were developed to address existing impediments, and exhibit areas of potential collaboration between the participating municipalities and SBR:
- Impediment 1: Need for Fair Housing Education and Outreach
 - GOAL: Improve the public's knowledge and awareness of the Fair Housing Act, related laws, regulations, and requirements to affirmatively further fair housing in the community.

- Impediment 2: Need for Affordable Housing
 - GOAL: Increase the supply of decent, safe, and sanitary housing that is affordable and accessible through the new construction and rehabilitation of various types of housing, especially housing that is affordable to lower income households.
- · Impediment 4: Public Policy
 - GOAL: Revise local Zoning Ordinances to promote the development of various types of affordable housing throughout the area.

These impediments are shared across the BEAN region. However, because the target boroughs are located in the Slate Belt and are outside of the more concentrated ABE metro area, SBR's focus will be placed on Northampton County Impediment 6: Condition of Affordable Housing Stock. Potential projects to address this impediment include the continuation of SBR's residential and commercial façade programs, as well as partnerships with other organizations to address the quality of housing stock, reduce blight, and weatherize existing properties.



FUTURELY: THE REGIONAL PLAN (2019)

SUMMARY

FutureLV is a comprehensive regional plan developed in a cooperative effort between the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission and the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study. The plan is meant to guide growth and development in the Lehigh Valley through 2045 and beyond. It emphasizes the rapid growth of the Lehigh Valley region, which encompasses both Northampton and Lehigh Counties. This growth is attributable to its proximity to major metropolitan areas and its increasing use as a central node in warehousing and logistics distribution. The plan stresses the need to approach development in a restrained manner and highlights the need for historic and natural preservation. FutureLV lays out five primary goals:

- 1. Efficient and Coordinated Development Pattern
- 2. Connected Mixed-Transportation Region
- 3. Protected and Vibrant Environment
- 4. Competitive, Creative and Sustainable Region
- 5. Safe, Healthy, Inclusive and Livable Communities

COMPATIBILITY

Whilst SBRCP is compatible with all facets of FutureLV, it particularly complements the following goals pulled directly from FutureLV:

- 1.3: Maintain regional character by preserving priority environmental, historic, cultural, scenic and agricultural assets.
- 4.1: Enhance growth by rooting economic development strategies in the unique competitive advantages of the region.

- 4.2: Continue diversification of the regional economy to strengthen economic resilience.
- 4.5: Provide a wide variety of attainable housing in locations that maximize social and economic opportunities for everyone.
- 4.6: Promote the fiscal health and sustainability of municipalities.
 - Expand collaboration on planning and development between neighboring communities.
- 5.2: Increase social and economic access to daily needs for all people.
- 5.4: Promote development that complements the unique history, environment, culture and needs of the Valley. Both community and economic development needs as stated in the Consolidated Plan—"There is a need to improve the community facilities, infrastructure, public services, and quality of life in the County" and "There is a need to encourage employment and to promote economic opportunities in the County," respectively—are also compatible with the goals of SBRCP.



MINSI LAKE CORRIDOR GREENWAY & STEWARDSHIP PLAN (2022)

SUMMARY

The Minsi Lake corridor is an 1,100 acre area situated in Mount Bethel Township in the Slate Belt—one of the northernmost parts of Northampton County. This plan was developed by the Northampton County Department of Parks and Recreation to guide the planning and development of an interconnected trail system and amenities, infrastructure improvements, policies for conservation land management and stewardship, climate change impact mitigation and enhanced recreation and environmental education programming.

COMPATIBILITY

This plan is compatible with SBR's goal of capitalizing on the region's natural features and beauty to help spur economic growth in the region while conserving the land and emphasizing the Slate Belt's history and heritage. In particular, the goal of expanding the interconnected trail system is something which SBR has supported in its previous plan through efforts such as providing signage for an expansion of trails in Wind Gap Park. This support would continue in SBRCP.



NORTHERN TIER TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY (2019)

SUMMARY

This study was conducted as a partnership between Northampton County and its 14 northernmost municipalities, which include the four target boroughs of Bangor, Pen Argyl, Portland, and Wind Gap, as well as five other Slate Belt municipalities—the townships of Plainfield, Washington, and Upper Mount Bethel and the boroughs of Roseto and East Bangor. The study's purpose was threefold: to proof the alignment of a 35-mile trail from the Lehigh River to the Delaware River; to identify the opportunities and constraints of linking the trail to existing parks, trails, boroughs and other special places; and to create an economic and tourism boost for the "Northern-Tier" of the County.

COMPATIBILITY

This study is wholly compatible with SBRCP, particularly with the goals of Vibrant Economic Climate and Regional Cooperation. By capitalizing on the natural beauty of the region and making it more accessible to residents and nonresidents alike, the expansion of the region's trail network has the potential to provide major economic benefits to the boroughs, especially to local small businesses. Additionally, as people from around the Lehigh Valley spend more time in the Slate Belt and become familiar with what it has to offer, it may have a "domino effect" of attracting more investment. This could lead to the Slate Belt becoming more integrated into the Lehigh Valley economy and consequently being seen as a part of, rather than separate from, the rest of the Valley.



COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT

INTRODUCTION

What follows is a detailed description of the data collection process for each of the three groups from which SBR solicited input, as well as an analysis of salient themes that emerged during the process.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

The Slate Belt Community Survey was conceived as a method of gathering feedback from the community to better understand their needs and priorities, as well as to offer them a platform for expressing what they thought would benefit the Slate Belt. The survey consisted of 22 questions in total, the majority of which were multiple choice and encouraged respondents to rate or rank various aspects of the community, such as safety in the community; housing infrastructure and affordability; access to amenities; quality of education; and more. While these multiple choice questions naturally produced discrete, quantitative data, two questions allowed for long-form

responses and thus produced qualitative data. Both forms of data are critical to obtaining comprehensive, actionable feedback. Survey questions also solicited basic demographic information from respondents to juxtapose with their feedback and draw potential correlations. Respondents' feedback was taken directly into consideration when developing the theme and focus areas of the new plan, as well as the Year 1 projects. A summary of survey results is linked at the end of this section.

A paper copy of the survey was distributed at two community events: the Bangor Vendor Market on November 13, 2021 and the Holly Jolly Vendor Festival on December 11, 2021. Completed paper surveys were then collected and entered into an online, digital version of the survey so that all data was available in one location. The digital version of the survey was developed using Microsoft Forms and made available to the public beginning on September 30, 2021. It was closed to the public on December 13, 2021. In

that time, SBR received a total of 144 responses from both the paper and digital versions of the survey combined. Of these, two-thirds of respondents were residents of the four-borough target area, and 81% were residents of the Slate Belt. The remaining 19% of respondents resided elsewhere in Northampton County or the Lehigh Valley. SBR promoted the survey utilizing a number of different methods, including email blasts; posts to social media; promotion on the program website; and encouraging Steering Committee and subcommittee members to share the survey with their contacts.

KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The role of Key Stakeholder input was to bridge the gap between the general, ground-level knowledge of community conditions provided by residents in the broader community survey, and the process-based knowledge held by Steering Committee and Subcommittee members. For its purposes, SBR defines Key Stakeholders as "individuals who hold positions of

leadership or prominence in their communities, are highly attuned to residents' needs and priorities, and possess a history of service and a deep connection to their community."

Key Stakeholders often have specialized backgrounds or areas of individual expertise which they bring to the table and can provide deeper insight on particular issues because of this experience. Additionally, narrative, long-form responses—as opposed to the multiple choice responses obtained through the broader community survey—can be much more helpful in painting a complete picture, weaving together seemingly disparate issues, and understanding how lived experience and recommendations connect. While SBR does not afford Key Stakeholder feedback any more weight in comparison to SBR committees or the community, it can be useful in identifying challenges or opportunities that otherwise might have not received adequate consideration or attention in the plan formulation process.



SBR's former director, Mr. Stephen Reider, contacted and interviewed 10 Key Stakeholders between October and December of 2021. They were:

- Dave Hess, Wind Gap Borough Council President
- Dave Manzo, Wind Gap Borough Council
- Brooke Kerzner, Bangor Borough Mayor and Business Owner
- Laura McClain, Slate Belt Chamber of Commerce
- Kay Bucci, Portland Borough Council/Resident
- James Kresge, Bangor Borough Council/Resident
- Krista Nagy, Slate Belt Resident and Former Director of the Pen Argyl Salvation Army
- Lance Prator, Portland Borough Mayor and Resident
- Patti Damour, Executive Director of Slater Family Network
- Rachel Burbank, CRA Fair Lending Officer at First Northern Bank & Trust

Each interview ranged between approximately 20 to 30 minutes in length and was composed of five questions. The questions were as follows:

 As a representative of [organization name], what do you value most about the Slate Belt? What would you change, enhance, or add to the Slate Belt to make it better? Feel free to provide suggestions specific to your municipality.

- 2. As you look ahead to the next 5 to 10 years, what are three important challenges you anticipate for the Slate Belt? What issue might become a big problem in five years if not addressed soon?
- 3. As you look ahead to the next 5 to 10 years, what are three opportunities you anticipate for the Slate Belt? (Why?)
- 4. Propose steps that the new neighborhood plan could take to improve the community in the next year.
- 5. What other thoughts can you share about the future in the Slate Belt? What kind of role do you want to play?
- 6. The response data was abbreviated and compiled into an Excel spreadsheet by SBR's planner, Vincent Behe. After analyzing the data, themes were extracted from Key Stakeholder responses. Given the heterogeneity of the data, it was necessary to narrow the scope to include only the most salient and highly recurring themes. Therefore, particular attention was paid to the top three most common responses for each question.



STEERING COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEES

With the exception of SBR's Program Sustainability subcommittee, where feedback was received via a virtual Zoom meeting, all feedback from Steering Committee and subcommittee members was obtained via email. At least one member of each committee submitted responses to a variety of prompts asking about community needs, the successes and shortcomings of the previous NPP, and what might be improved upon in the new plan. Committee members also gave suggestions for specific projects to be pursued in the new plan.

ANALYSIS AND MAJOR THEMES

Through its outreach, SBR heard from a diverse group of people representing an array of demographic groups from every one of the target area boroughs and beyond. It is the top priority of SBR that these people see their needs provided for and their concerns addressed in SBRCP. While many opinions were voiced, it quickly became apparent that the broadest consensus for emphasis in the new plan was for the following three areas:

- · Vibrant Economic Climate
- Quality, Affordable Housing
- Regional Cooperation and Community Engagement

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONDENT PROFILE

81% of survey respondents were Slate Belt residents. Over 50% reported having lived in the Slate Belt for 21 years or more. Less than half of respondents said they work in the Slate Belt, but a very small fraction—2%—classified themselves as unemployed. The average respondent was older, wealthier, and more educated than the average resident of the Slate Belt. Specifically, 79% of respondents had a household income of \$50,000 or greater, 87% had at least some college, and 89% were aged 35 or above, with no respondents below the age of 25.

VIBRANT ECONOMIC CLIMATE

The economic vitality of the Slate Belt region was, across the board, the most important issue for Slate Belt residents, other survey respondents, Key Stakeholder interviews, and Steering Committee and subcommittee members alike. It was seen by many individuals as both a present-day challenge and a future opportunity.

As noted by a host of respondents, there is a dearth of employment opportunities in the Slate Belt. Many Slate Belt residents that are employed have jobs elsewhere; less than half of community survey respondents reported working in the Slate Belt. Access to employment opportunities was the most common choice for respondents when asked what they liked least about living in the Slate Belt. It was also the second most negatively perceived aspect of the community, with 14% of respondents rating it positively and 55% negatively. Simply put, the iobs are not in the Slate Belt: they are elsewhere. Key Stakeholders concurred on this point; lack of employment

opportunities for residents was viewed as one of the most important challenges facing the area in the next decade. However, employment opportunities for residents were also listed by many as an opportunity for the area in the next decade as well. Key Stakeholders suggested that a crucial part of taking advantage of this opportunity would be establishing more extensive educational and professional training options for local residents so as to further develop the workforce and make use of untapped potential.

Frustration with the unavailability of jobs can be closely tied to a strong desire, shared by survey respondents. Key Stakeholders, and SBR committee members alike, to support existing small businesses and attract new ones. Many cited small businesses as being advantageous not only for economic growth and development, but for contributing to the charming character and small-town feel that help define the Slate Belt as well. Small business support was the most chosen option both when it came to opportunities for the area in the next decade and for steps which the new plan could take to improve the community in the next year. Small business support had overwhelmingly strong backing among community survey respondents as well; 5 out of 6 respondents wanted SBR to put either "some" or "maximum" effort into supporting small business in the new plan, more than any other area. Several respondents suggested revitalizing the downtown areas of Slate Belt boroughs by attracting more small business: one asserted that "the Slate

Belt would benefit with more "anchor" or "destination" type businesses," and another that the area needed "Investments in business friendly infrastructure/buildings." Mom and pop type businesses were seen as desirable and referenced frequently; "little shops" such as a "flower store, antique shop, [and] children's' clothing store" were examples used by a respondent.

Across all three streams of feedback. but particularly in the community survey and Key Stakeholder interviews, overdevelopment, especially with regard to warehousing, was a source of concern. Much of the apprehension could be traced to concerns that accelerating industrial and warehouse development would overwhelm local infrastructure with truck and other commercial traffic. One Key Stakeholder gave the specific example of Rt. 611—a major state route that runs through the Slate Belt-as being under particular strain due to the development that is rapidly taking place around it. The quality of area roads and bridges was highlighted as subpar. Simply put, almost all agreed that the construction of new infrastructure and repair of existing infrastructure has not kept pace with development and increasing demand in recent years. "Smart growth" was an oft-used term, as those providing feedback acknowledged the delicate balance of achieving economic growth whilst leaving the small-town feel, close knit community, and strong local history intact.

QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A large fraction of respondents to the community survey expressed dissatisfaction with the housing stock in the Slate Belt, particularly in terms of quality, availability, and affordability. "Affordability of housing" and "types of housing for me" were the second and fifth mostcited responses when respondents were asked what they liked least about living in the Slate Belt. Interestingly, these sentiments were reversed when talking about their personal places of residence; "my house or apartment" was cited as the thing respondents most liked about living in the Slate Belt. A contributing factor to this phenomenon could be that a disproportionately large number of survey respondents themselves owned a house; 85% said that they own their current residence. with only 15% identifying as renters. These numbers are anomalous when compared to those of the target area, where a mere 58.1% of the population owns their residence. However, even for those who do own a residence, many are limited in their options, as respondents gave both the quality and affordability of available housing low ratings. Indeed, quality of housing was one of the most negatively perceived aspects of the Slate Belt, with 15.2% of respondents rating it positively and 47.1% rating it negatively. The resulting -31.9% differential was the third-lowest out of 13 options provided. This response from the community survey put it in stark terms: "I have grown up in

Bangor Borough. I have witnessed the decline of the Borough...Houses are dingy and unkept. You can see the clear line as you drive through the Borough of people that have money and take care of their property and those that don't."

Respondents expressed apprehension regarding the proliferation of renters and rental housing in the area. One respondent suggested that the Slate Belt could be improved "If everyone took a little more pride in the properties. We have a lot of renters in this area & they don't seem to have the same pride for properties as homeowners do." One SBR Steering Committee member noted that renters are more transient. Another respondent had the idea of no longer allowing first floor apartments in downtowns. And one simply put "reduce number of rental properties." The wariness of renters and rental properties seems in part connected to an underlying concern that this will change the character of the area and decrease affordability - "Keep [the Slate Belt] from building another complex like the one that was just built in Wind Gap." The pressure that luxury housing construction would put on landlords and developers to raise prices was a concern voiced by multiple Key Stakeholders, as well.

Beautification and cleanliness of existing properties and the community was a top priority for respondents. Some alluded to the efforts in which SBR has already engaged regarding façade repair and murals and

expressed support of those efforts -"Continue to beautify the downtown area. It has improved so much!" However, overall cleanliness of the area was a commonly mentioned priority as well. This response ties the two threads together: "Painting buildings is a great idea, however a massive cleanup needs to be done," and another with a similar sentiment "Clean up the streets of garbage. leaves, debris and weeds along the curbs and in [individual properties]." Code enforcement to keep properties in compliance was another commonly cited suggestion. In Key Stakeholder interviews, housing rehabilitation and development was tied as the top suggestion for steps the new plan can take to improve the community in the next year. Other popular suggestions from both the community survey and Key Stakeholder interviews with regard to non-housing infrastructure were the improvement of roads and sidewalks and the addition of more walking paths.



REGIONAL COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There was a great deal of civic pride and strong ties to the community expressed in all the feedback received by SBR. Over 50% of community survey respondents reported having lived in the Slate Belt for 21 years or more. When asked to choose three words to describe the Slate Belt. over three quarters of respondents selected "small town," followed by "community" and "hometown." Given this level of affection and rootedness. it is no surprise that communication and collaboration-between residents, organizations, and municipalitieswere also priorities for respondents.

Three quarters of survey respondents wanted SBR to put effort into community engagement and

involvement activities in the new plan, with close to half of respondents expressing a desire for "maximum effort." Key Stakeholders, for their part, were unanimous in their selection of "Sense of Community and Small Town Feel" as what they liked most about living in the Slate Belt. However, they also noted a recent trend of apathy, disengagement, and unfamiliarity between area residents, even neighbors. One responded that the negativity of local residents could pose a potential problem for the area and that it was crucial to change their mindset. Another interviewee characterized it as a persistent morale issue and said that the "Slate Belt proud" ethos that once drove the communities needed to be recaptured. Sample suggestions from the survey include "More civic

education and engagement" and "Larger community participation and stakeholder involvement." Apart from a reorientation of residents' civic habits and levels of engagement, there was also an evident desire for more partnership and collaboration between organizations and municipalities. For Key Stakeholders, this was a popular choice when asked what opportunities the region could take advantage of in the next decade. Key Stakeholders expressed a belief that Slate Belt communities could accomplish more together. By focusing on resource pooling and collaboration—for example, as one Key Stakeholder suggested, a regional fire department-local gaps and blind spots in funding can be addressed. This would also lead to greater unity

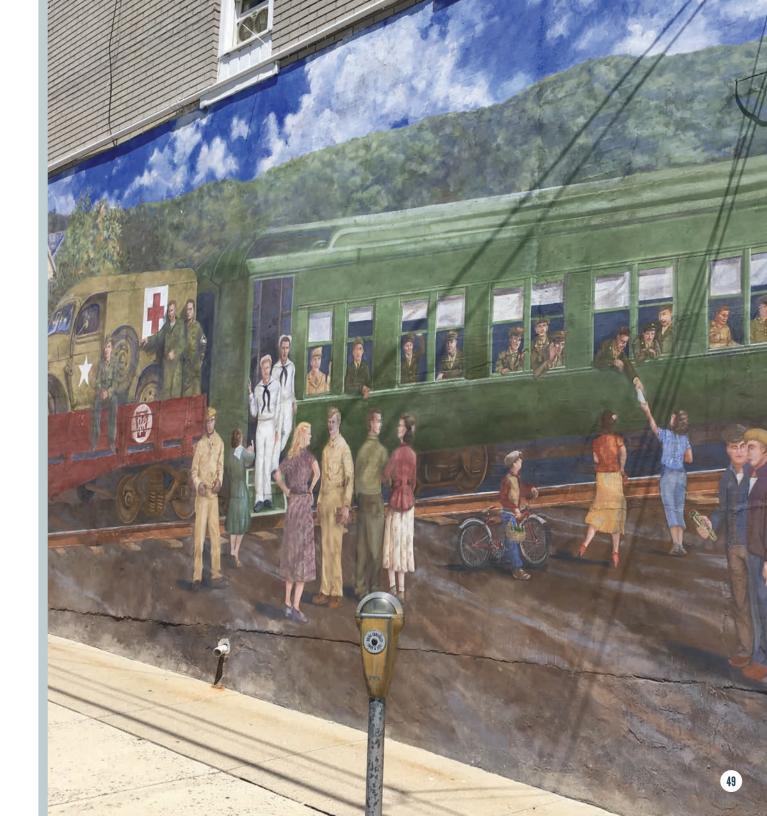
and a shared sense of community. A community survey respondent wanted to "create more unity between the boroughs." One Bangor resident suggested regionalized police and EMS services. The regionalization of first-responder groups, namely police and fire departments as well as EMS, was an idea backed by both community survey respondents and Key Stakeholders. Another potential regional effort could be the adoption of a code enforcement officer, as many survey respondents highlighted more stringent code enforcement as a priority with regard to the cleanliness and appearance of area properties.

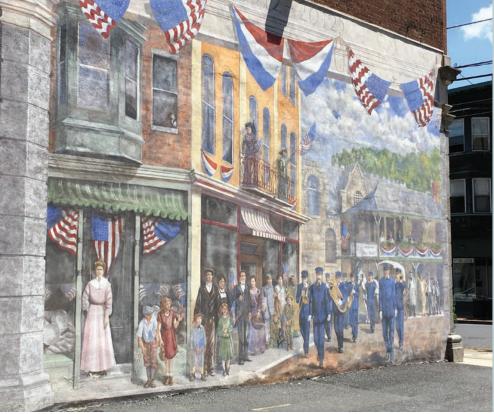


BETHLEHEM BLIGHT BETTERMENT INITIATIVE (2018)

In September 2017, the City of Bethlehem partnered with the Reinvestment Fund, Atria Planning, and May 8 Consulting, along with nonprofit and private community organizations to tackle blight and disinvestment in Bethlehem through the Bethlehem Blight Betterment Initiative (B3). The objective was to take a data-driven approach to mitigate blight and improve the city's housing stock, using market value analysis of the city's diverse neighborhoods.

The Bethlehem Blight Betterment Initiative Study identified south Bethlehem as a "stressed market." The study analyzed housing values and sales-related characteristics, such as owner-occupied versus renter-occupied homes, rentals with a subsidy, housing density, investor purchases, and the percentage of code violations and blighted properties. The Study concluded that south Bethlehem is mostly a rental market, and it has the lowest median sales price, at roughly \$69,047, in the City of Bethlehem. However, it should be noted that, as of recently, the sales prices in south Bethlehem have risen due to an increase in demand and decrease in supply of housing seen throughout the entire Lehigh Valley but most notably in the 18015 zip code, in which south Bethlehem resides. The map below depicts south Bethlehem (located in the southern portion of the map) as having both a large concentration of blighted properties and an area which contains the lowest median sales prices within the City of Bethlehem.







CONCLUSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

A great diversity of opinions and ideas were expressed across all three avenues of feedback; it is impossible for SBR to act upon each one. However, SBR's commitment is to pour time and resources into the project areas in which the community has indicated the highest need and which are most feasible to accomplish with the resources and within the six-year time window granted for NPPs. This boils down to one calculation: which project areas and specific projects guarantee the highest impact to resources invested ratio? Through the community survey, Key Stakeholder interviews, and current Steering Committee and subcommittee feedback, three project focus areas were identified as being optimal for the investment of SBR and community resources:

- 1. 1. Quality, Affordable Housing
- 2. 2. Vibrant Economic Climate
- 3. Regional Cooperation and Community Engagement

Each project pursued by SBR over the next six years will have the end goal of making positive change in one of these areas.

SBR's solicitation of feedback uncovered something of a paradox: while in many ways, area residents feel that the Slate Belt has recently moved in the wrong direction (31% of survey respondents said that the area has declined "some" or "a lot" in recent years), they are still

optimistic for the future and harbor a great love for their communities. Here is just a sampling of some of the positive encouragement and community spirit SBR received through the survey:

- "My husband grew up here, and I moved here when we got married. I actually really like the community and I think the people are incredibly friendly and helpful."
- "This is a great little town and I've been enjoying the aesthetic improvements."
- "2 years in [the] Slate Belt so far, we love it here and can't wait to see the downtown area thrive again."

To summarize, those who live in the Slate Belt have faith in its "bones:" the ethos of hard work and resilience that persists from its days as a hub of slate production; its institutions and people; its natural beauty, history, and tradition. For this reason, even though many are dissatisfied with the present, there exists a vein of optimism about the future that, if tapped into, can help drive the Slate Belt communities and push them to new heights, both individually and as a collective. SBR will play a central role in generating the momentum and providing the organization, resources, and experience needed to execute projects which will make this optimistic future a reality.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES & ACTIVITIES



GOAL 1



GOAL 2



GOAL 3





OBJECTIVE: Improve commercial districts to promote economic development and enhance community pride

ACTIVITY: Improve streetscapes and neighborhood walkability to facilitate patronage of local businesses

ACTIVITY: Incorporate public art into commercial districts and trail networks to tell the story of the Slate Belt

ACTIVITY: Facilitate a commercial façade and distinctive signage program

ACTIVITY: Promote conversion of vacant buildings to commercial or mixed-use properties

OBJECTIVE: Develop the entrepreneurial talent of the Slate Belt and create opportunities for small business success

ACTIVITY: Increase internet accessibility for low-income people by partnering with community organizations to provide affordable broadband to the public

ACTIVITY: Support new and existing businesses by defraying overhead costs through a Commercial Lease Subsidy program

ACTIVITY: Promote entrepreneurial training and provide other assistance to small businesses in the Slate Belt through Slate Belt Rising and Rising Tide Community Loan Fund.

ACTIVITY: Create economic opportunity for Slate Belt youth by offering a yearly scholarship to students of Pen Argyl and Bangor Area School Districts

OBJECTIVE: Promote opportunities for shopping, dining, and recreation that leverage the history and authentic charm of the Slate Belt's boroughs

ACTIVITY: Execute marketing and promotional campaigns to raise awareness of Slate Belt businesses and events

ACTIVITY: Recruit new and support existing businesses that provide goods and services to visitors and residents



OBJECTIVE: Create strong, attractive neighborhoods with affordable and well-maintained housing options for both owners and renters

ACTIVITY: Promote homeownership counseling to prospective homebuyers and current homeowners through CALV Housing Counseling.

ACTIVITY: Improve the housing stock and remediate blight through façade, housing rehabilitation, and weatherization services in partnership with Community Action's Housing and Weatherization programs, and the County of Northampton.

ACTIVITY: Create attractive neighborhoods with affordable and well-maintained housing options for both owners and renters

ACTIVITY: Develop, in partnership with the County of Northampton and Slate Belt boroughs, a rental registration process and landlord database to track property locations and conditions.

ACTIVITY: Educate landlords and tenants about their rights and responsibilities

ACTIVITY: Encourage municipalities to enforce their building codes

enforce their building codes

ACTIVITY: Explore the possibility of a multi-

municipal code enforcement effort



OBJECTIVE: Promote regional planning, cooperation, and coordination of services throughout the Slate Belt

ACTIVITY: Participate in planning efforts that encourage regional cooperation and help with implementation of the Slate Belt Multi-Municipal Plan

ACTIVITY: Partner with other organizations that share the aim of revitalizing the Slate Belt

ACTIVITY: Continue to develop local and r egional corporate partnerships with businesses that have a regional presence and that employ Slate Belt residents

OBJECTIVE: Improve the region's recreational opportunities and leverage the natural beauty of the Slate Belt

ACTIVITY: Assist with the development of regional trail networks and recreational opportunities such as the Northern Tier Trail and Minsi Lake Corridor Greenway and Stewardship Plan.

OBJECTIVE: Organize community activities and events

ACTIVITY: Develop and assist with festivals, concerts, farmers' markets, and other events throughout the region

ACTIVITY: Develop a "Slate Belt Proud" marketing campaign designed to increase community engagement and civic participation



OBJECTIVE: Create a sustainable organization that can effectively mobilize the community to meet its diverse needs

ACTIVITY: Engage local residents in the process of neighborhood revitalization by creating volunteer and leadership opportunities

ACTIVITY: Develop a comprehensive fundraising strategy that is sufficient to meet the aims of the plan



PLAN SUSTAINABILITY

PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

Three corporations have generously agreed to partner with Slate Belt Rising to offer their financial support in the amounts listed below for the duration of SBRCP. They are:

- Fidelity Bank \$60,000
- First Northern Bank and Trust - \$50,000
- Waste Management \$50,000

This amounts to \$160,000 in yearly project contributions, or nearly \$1 million invested over the course of the six-year project period. Two contributors - Fidelity Bank and Waste Management previously supported Slate Belt Rising's last six-year plan. First Northern Bank and Trust is a new contributor and partner. ESSA Bank and Trust has also committed a \$25,000 cash contribution for each of the first two years of program operations. We are grateful for their support and for making this ambitious project a possibility. Slate Belt Rising also plans to leverage contributed funds to attract additional local, state, federal, and private funding to maximize the financial resources available for implementation.

OTHER FUNDING

CALV, on behalf of SBR, pursues grants from regional and local foundations and public entities to support specific projects that align with the larger community revitalization effort. CALV's executive director and planning department will work with the SBR director and Steering Committee to identify new funders, both large and small, to sustain the program. As an

organization with a budget of over \$30 million for diverse community projects, CALV has the capacity to attract significant private and public resources. While the Slate Belt has few large corporations, relationships with those that are in place will continue to be developed so that the program can continue for as long as it is needed by the community. Northampton County has made a significant commitment to investing in the Slate Belt, both through Slate Belt Rising and through the municipalities and other organizations. The Slate Belt Rising program receives nearly \$300,000 in funding on an annual basis from diverse sources, such as corporate and private/individual contributions; federal funding, including the Community Service Block Grant and Northampton County Community Development Block Grant programs; Northampton County's Grow NORCO and Hotel Tax grant programs; and the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are the cornerstone of any successful long-term community revitalization effort. In recognition of this fact, and building upon the strong partnerships cultivated over the last six years, SBR will look to coordinate and collaborate with the following organizations in project implementation and other efforts in SBRCP:

 Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development

- County of Northampton
- Boroughs of Bangor, Pen Argyl, Portland, and Wind Gap
- Slate Belt Chamber of Commerce
- Slate Belt Council of Governments
- Bangor Area School District and Pen Argyl Area School District
- Slater Family Network and Families First
- Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation
- Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
- · Friends of Minsi Lake
- Discover Lehigh Valley
- Bangor Public Library and Blue Mountain Community Library
- · Blue Valley Times
- Historical Bangor Business Association
- Slate Belt YMCA

In addition to SBR's many partners in the public, corporate, and nonprofit sectors, as well as individual residents and business owners, there will be a particular focus in SBRCP on expanding collaboration with other CALV programs, such as the Rising Tide Community Loan Fund and CALV's Community Action Homes and Weatherization programs, to expand the availability and accessibility of services and

programming in the Slate Belt area. Examples include the provision of small business workshops, technical assistance to small business owners, assistance to homeowners in applying for weatherization, and connecting homeowners with the owner-occupied rehab program.

PARTICIPATION OF SMALL DIVERSE BUSINESSES

SBR understands the value of diversity and the importance of elevating voices from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups. In the last six years, SBR has assisted and partnered with women- and minority-owned and run businesses and organizations, including:

- Imagevolution
- · A Clean Slate
- · Bloom Creative Studio
- Pen Argyl Pizza
- Slate Belt Chamber of Commerce
- Slate Belt YMCA

Throughout the course of SBRCP, SBR will continue to assist women- and minority-owned and run businesses, providing them with the resources and support needed to achieve success and become integral parts of the community.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee is comprised of no fewer than fifteen persons and no more than twenty-five individuals who have a stake in the health and vitality of the boroughs of Wind Gap, Pen Argyl, Bangor, and Portland. The Steering Committee maintains a diverse membership that includes both demographic as well as stakeholder diversity. For this reason, at least one-half of the Steering Committee are borough residents and/or business owners. The number of non-borough resident business owners may not exceed one third of the resident representation. Other important stakeholders include state legislators, the County of Northampton, Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation, and the Slate Belt Chamber of Commerce. At least one Steering Committee member is a member of the Board of Directors of CACLV.

In addition, four subcommittees have been formulated to focus on specific areas in SBRCP:

- Vibrant Economic Climate to execute projects within the Vibrant Economic Climate focus area
- Quality, Affordable Housing to execute projects within the Quality, Affordable Housing focus area
- Regional Cooperation and Community Engagement – to execute projects within the Regional Cooperation and Community Engagement focus area

Sustainable Slate Belt Rising

 to ensure the continued
 financial stability and resiliency
 of the program

These subcommittees, which include local residents, business owners, and other stakeholders, are designed to promote community involvement while also making programmatic and funding recommendations to the Steering Committee. At least one member from each subcommittee is a member of the Steering Committee.

ANNUAL ACTION PLANS

Each year, the steering committee will review project proposals from each subcommittee. The steering committee will determine the priorities for spending based on the objectives of SBRCP, community conditions, input of community residents and other stakeholders. and the resources that are available. Program accomplishments and successes will be recorded, documented, and reported on. Slate Belt Rising will comply with all Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP) requirements and keep the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and all stakeholders well-informed about neighborhood accomplishments, success stories, and program implementation.



SIX-YEAR PROJECT TIMELINE







BELOW IS AN APPROXIMATE TIMELINE FOR THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF EACH PROJECT ACTIVITY OVER THE COURSE OF SBRCP.

VIBRANT ECONOMIC CLIMATE

ACTIVITY	YEAR 1 2022-2023	YEAR 1 2023-2024	YEAR 3 2024-2025	YEAR 4 2025-2026	YEAR 5 2026-2027	YEAR 6 2027-2028
Improve streetscapes and neighborhood walkability to facilitate patronage of local businesses	00	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	P O
Incorporate public art into commercial districts and trail networks to tell the story of the Slate Belt	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Facilitate a commercial façade and distinctive signage program	0 0	P O	0 0	0 0	P 0	0 0
Promote conversion of vacant buildings to commercial or mixed-use properties	P	0 0	0 0	0 0	P O	0 0
Increase internet accessibility for low-income people by partnering with community organizations to provide affordable broadband to the public	Ð	0 0	0 0	00	0 0	P O
Support new and existing businesses by defraying overhead costs through a Commercial Lease Subsidy program	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Promote entrepreneurial training and provide other assistance to small businesses in the Slate Belt through Slate Belt Rising and Rising Tide Community Loan Fund.	P	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Create economic opportunity for Slate Belt youth by offering a yearly scholarship to students of Pen Argyl and Bangor Area School Districts	0 0	0 0				
Execute marketing and promotional campaigns to raise awareness of Slate Belt businesses and events	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Recruit new and support existing businesses that provide goods and services to visitors and residents	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0







QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HOUSING

ACTIVITY	YEAR 1 2022-2023	YEAR 1 2023-2024	YEAR 3 2024-2025	YEAR 4 2025-2026	YEAR 5 2026-2027	YEAR 6 2027-2028
Promote homeownership counseling to prospective homebuyers and current homeowners through CALV Housing Counseling.	P	P O	00	0	P O	0 0
Improve the housing stock and remediate blight through façade, housing rehabilitation, and weatherization services in partnership with Community Action Better Homes, CALV Weatherization, and the County of Northampton.	0 0	0 0	0	00	0 0	P O
Create attractive neighborhoods with affordable and well-maintained housing options for both owners and renters	P	P O	0 0	0	P 0	0 0
Develop, in partnership with the County of Northampton and Slate Belt boroughs, a rental registration process and landlord database to track property locations and conditions.	•	0 0	• •	00	0 0	P O
Educate landlords and tenants about their rights and responsibilities	P	0 0	0 0	0 0	P O	0 0
Encourage municipalities to enforce their building codes	P	0 0	0 0	0 0	P O	0 0
Explore the possibility of a multi-municipal code enforcement effort	P	0 0	0 0	0 0	P 0	0 0







REGIONAL COOPERATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ACTIVITY	YEAR 1 2022-2023	YEAR 1 2023-2024	YEAR 3 2024-2025	YEAR 4 2025-2026	YEAR 5 2026-2027	YEAR 6 2027-2028
Participate in planning efforts that encourage regional cooperation and help with implementation of the Slate Belt Multi-Municipal Plan	0 0	P O	0 0	0 0	0	0 0
Partner with other organizations that share the aim of revitalizing the Slate Belt	0	0 0	0 0	P 0	0 0	P 0
Continue to develop local and regional corporate partnerships with businesses that have a regional presence and that employ Slate Belt residents	00	P 0	0	00	P 0	0 0
Assist with the development of regional trail networks and recreational opportunities such as the Northern Tier Trail and Minsi Lake Corridor Greenway and Stewardship Plan	0 0	0 0	P 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Develop and assist with festivals, concerts, farmers' markets, and other events throughout the region	0 0	0	P 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Develop a "Slate Belt Proud" marketing campaign designed to increase community engagement and civic participation	•	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0

SUSTAINABLE SLATE BELT RISING

ACTIVITY	YEAR 1 2022-2023	YEAR 1 2023-2024	YEAR 3 2024-2025	YEAR 4 2025-2026	YEAR 5 2026-2027	YEAR 6 2027-2028
Engage local residents in the process of neighborhood revitalization by creating volunteer and leadership opportunities	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	P O
Develop a comprehensive fundraising strategy that is sufficient to meet the aims of the plan	0 0	0	0 0	0 0	0 0	P O