



**YEAR**  
**ONE**



**IMAGINE**  
**BERKS**

## KEY PRINCIPLES

The plan is based on several overarching principles that provide the foundation for realizing the vision.



Invest in strategies that support the retention and creation of “opportunity jobs”



Ensure public accountability in plan implementation by reporting back on progress



Prioritize investment in redevelopment activities, including industrial, commercial and residential projects



Leverage the County’s position as a regional partner



Invest in development that increases the tax base of Berks County



Recognize and support the growing diversity of the Berks community

# BUILD

**GOAL: To encourage industrial and commercial redevelopment and support land development that increases the tax base.**

## Year 1

### Mapping our Assets

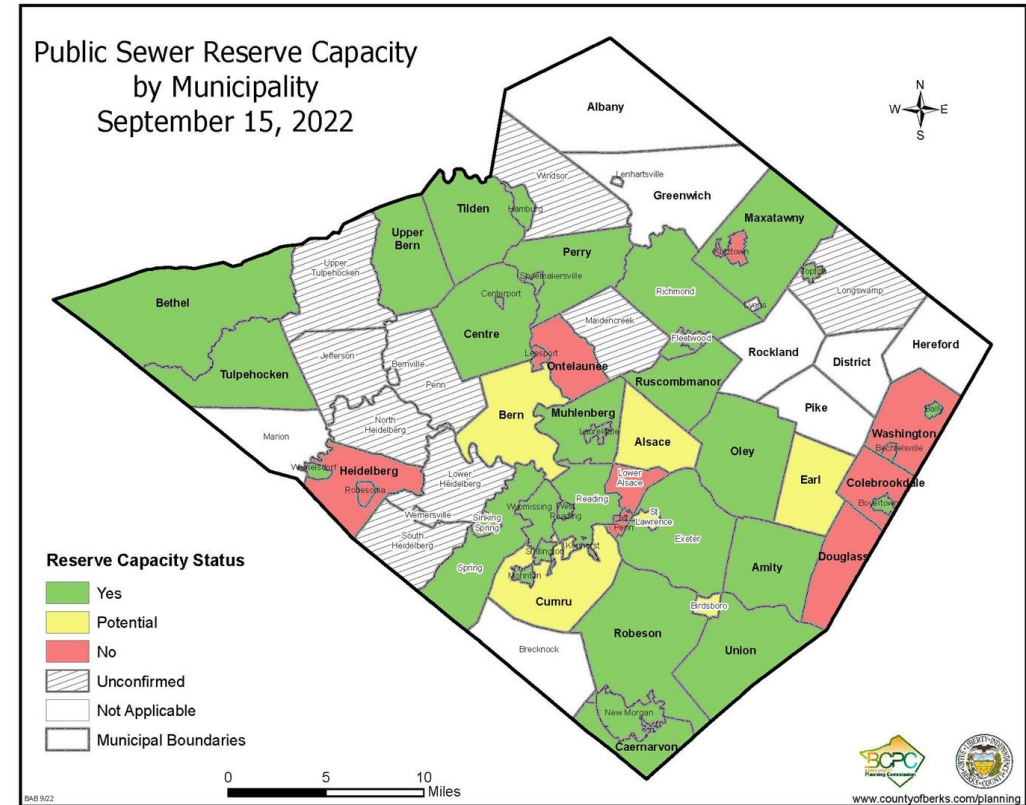
Sewer and wastewater mapping completed  
Broadband mapping completed

### Support agribusiness industry growth

Expansion of County Department of Agriculture

### Regional Cooperation

Participation and completion of a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the South-Central region.



# BUILD

## Year 1

### Supporting Passenger Rail Expansion

SRPRA leadership and support

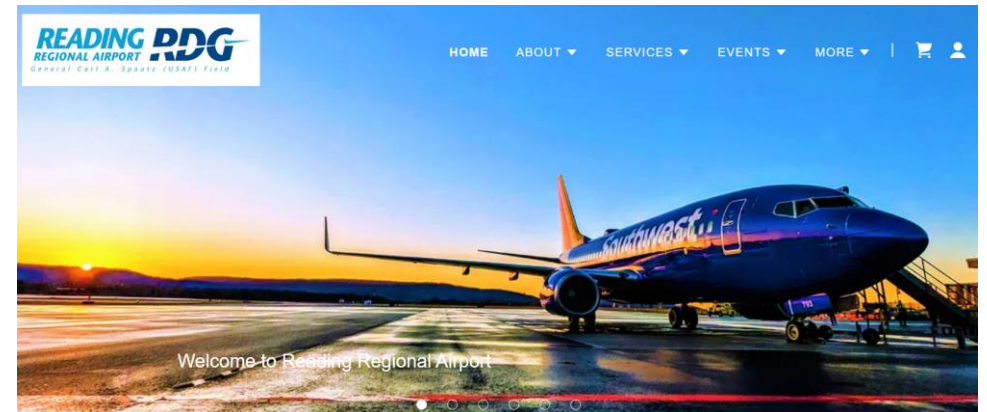
Service Development Plan underway with \$750k and TOD planning \$143k

### Positioning the Airport as an Economic Development Asset

New Airport Authority leadership

New website

Development opportunities in the pipeline



## BUILD

# Success



9 Regional Meetings were held bringing together school district, municipal and county officials to discuss growth opportunities and future planning.



# Small Business & Entrepreneurship

**GOAL: Support Small Business and encourage Entrepreneurship to enable the creation of high-growth ventures, main street amenities, and wealth-building for residents.**

## Year 1

### Access to Financial Resources

\$35,000 was provided to 7 organizations and businesses through Financial Lending Innovation Collaborative (FLIC)

Loans totaling \$136,000 were provided to 6 businesses through the new small business lending program administered by NHSGB with funds provided by GBDF

### Local Sourcing and Business to Business Procurement

225 + farms and farm businesses are listed on the GrowTogether Local Food Map found at [GrowtogetherBerks.com/directory](https://growtogetherberks.com/directory)



# Small Business & Entrepreneurship Success



"With the grant award from the County, Dirt 2 Dinner Distribution was able to connect more and more producers with end users who were happy to pay the going rate for these fresh products." - Sherry Fuhrmann, Pure Wild Tea



# Talent & Economic Mobility

**GOAL:** Invest in the county's greatest asset – its people – by supporting structures to connect residents to opportunity jobs so that they may more fully contribute to and benefit from the Berks County economy.

## Year 1

### Invest in and support workforce readiness and upskilling initiatives

- Provided \$127,050 to I-LEAD for a Hi-SET program to graduate 90 entrants.
- BCPS is receiving \$300,000 from the Whole-Home Repair funds for workforce development
- Several program providers are delivering ESL training at businesses and geared to incumbent workers – adding professional and personal value

### Support businesses in recruiting talent

- The Meet Greater RDG brand messaging is being used as a talent attraction AND retention tool

MEET  
*Greater*  
RDG



IMAGINE  
BERKS

## Talent & Economic Mobility

# Success



The Weitz Healthcare Pavillion and John and Karen Arnold School of Nursing were both supported by \$1M grants from the County of Berks.



# Placemaking

**GOAL:** : Invest in and highlight community assets that provide access to a variety of arts, culture, greenspace, and recreation opportunities for all residents and future residents.

## Year 1

### Public Space

December 2022 the County's Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan was formally adopted by the County.

### A Collaborative Berks County message

PA Americana added Reading & Berks County to its brand identification.

### Commitment to Main Streets & Commercial Districts

Investments in Hamburg, Kutztown, and Boyertown solidified them as points of destination



## Placemaking

## Success



The Kutztown Community Partnership was able to purchase the Kutztown Stand Theatre, a downtown landmark to use as community meeting and event space.



# Housing

**GOAL: : Address the county's needs for new housing and redeveloped housing that is accessible and attainable.**

## Year 1

### Regional Planning meetings included dialogue on housing

- The Whole-Home Repair Program was funded through the Commonwealth and is administered by the BCRA.

### Prioritize a Staff Position focused on Housing

- Recognizing that a focus needed to be placed on the role of housing in economic development – the BCRA hired a Housing Planner.



# Housing

# Success



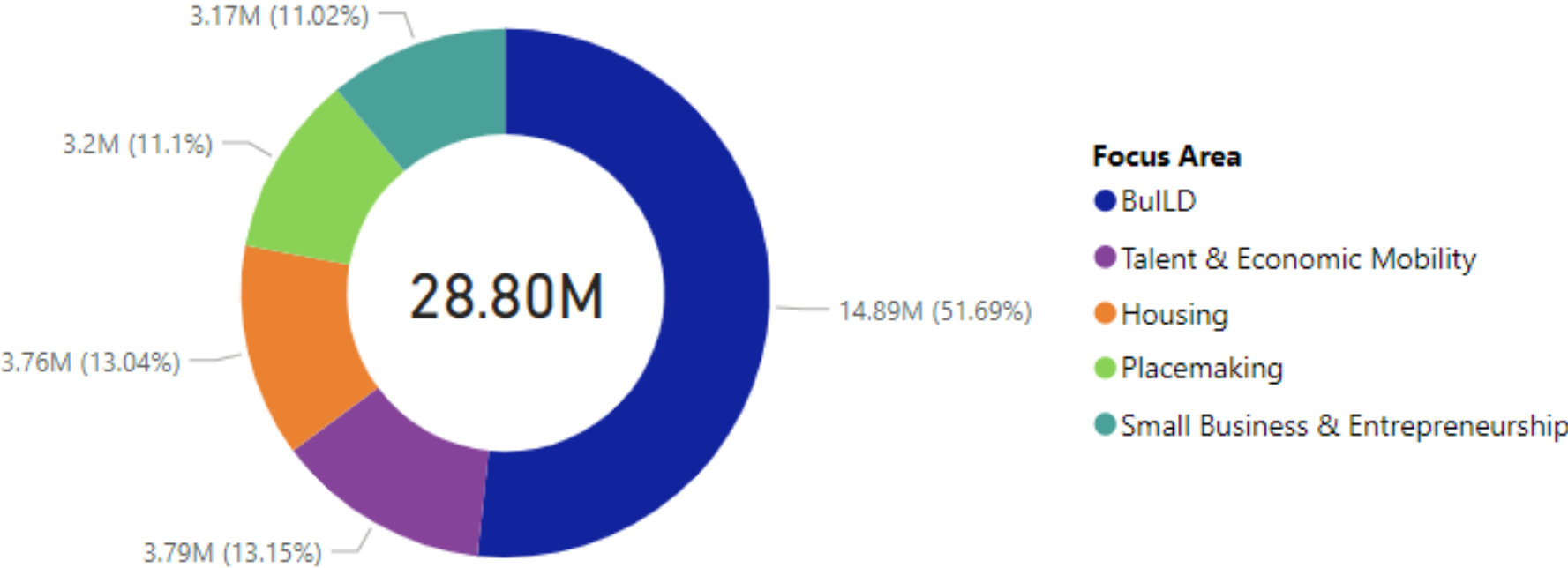
Jaime Perez was hired In April as the Housing Planner for the county.



# Success

## Implementation Funding: IMAGINE Berks Year 1

Sum of Funding Amount by Focus Area



## Year 1



### SUCCESSES

- \$28 M + invested across all Focus Areas
- New IMAGINE Berks website
- Hired a Housing Planner
- Adoption of County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan
- 9 Regional Municipal Meetings  
Led to 8 requests for Joint Comprehensive Plans
- BCRA's Whole-Home Repair rollout
- Collaboration, Cooperation, Commitment Among Stakeholders



### CHALLENGES

- Competing Land Uses
- Local Consensus On Growth Strategies
- Aligning Data
- Communications

## YEAR 2 IMPLEMENTATION

# KEY ACTIONS



### BUILD

Rollout of a \$5M Infrastructure Fund that will be administered by the Berks IDA



### SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

New micro-grant and micro-loan programs to expand access to capital for Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses.



### TALENT AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY:

Support activity of the Healthcare Connections Industry Partnership and Disconnected Youth grants to increase Labor force participation and available opportunity jobs.



### HOUSING

Establish guidelines for a \$1M housing investment program to accelerate development of attainable and accessible housing



### PLACEMAKING

Support Main Street activity with customized data.  
Direct an additional \$250,000 to projects that align with Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan



[IMAGINEBerks.org](https://IMAGINEBerks.org)

