

Chapter 7

Economic Development Plan

Goals

- ◆ Create a healthy balanced economy which provides necessary goods and services for North East's population, sufficient job opportunities for its residents, and sufficient tax base to finance necessary municipal improvements and services.
- ◆ Diversify and expand the Town's economic base to provide a broad range of employment and commercial opportunities within the framework of the Town and County's overall growth management goals and objectives.

Objectives

- ◆ Encourage select employers providing skilled job opportunities commensurate with the abilities of the Town's local work force.
- ◆ Upgrade, expand and preserve the Central Business District so that it remains a viable economic unit.
- ◆ Protect the historic character of North East and support projects and efforts which enhance that character.
- ◆ Encourage the growth and diversification of the tourism industry in North East, and promote additional tourism and travel related development which compliments the scenic and historic qualities of North East.
- ◆ Expand the Town's tax base.

The Economic Development Plan establishes objectives and policies for preserving and strengthening retail service and industrial activities of North East. Well-planned diversification and expansion of the Town's and region's economy provides North East and its residents a more stable and secure economic base. A successful economic development program creates jobs and income and also bolsters the Town's tax base thereby providing funds for needed community facilities, services, and improvements.

The economy of North East, and Cecil County as a whole, is strongly influenced by developments in the Wilmington/Newark area, Baltimore, Harford County and New Jersey. One indicator of this relationship shows that there is a strong commuter-shed between North East area and Wilmington, Harford County, and Baltimore, as evident from the 2000 Census data.

Within North East, the commercial and employment base is concentrated in the central business district along Main Street. These businesses are small retail and service outlets

catering to the local population and summer tourists. In addition, North East Station and North East Commerce Center also serve as an employment base.

The commercial area to the north of Town along US 40 is geared towards travelers and offers a broad and extensive shopping corridor and consists of strip development. An industrial park is located north of the MD 272/US 40 intersection and south of I-95.

To the south of Town, privately owned marinas and beaches provide jobs locally while attracting customers from all of Cecil and Harford counties, Baltimore, Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

Recommendations

Promoting local businesses should be a cooperative public/private undertaking. Further cooperation with the County Office of Economic Development and Maryland Departments of Planning and Economic Development will help attract suitable industry to expand and diversify the economic base. Industrial prospects should be screened and evaluated to ensure the activity will be compatible with the Town character.

Tourism

The economic well-being of the local businesses, and particularly the central business district, is strongly dependent on the summer tourism trade. Tourist information is provided at the Town Hall, Santa House, the Chamber of Commerce and all along Main Street. These centers provide pamphlets, maps, calendars of events, and other information describing the various types of public and private recreational activities and facilities in and near North East.

From retail to tourism, the Central Business District plays a vital role in many aspects of the Town making it key that this area remain a viable economic center. The Town should continue to participate with Cecil County in their promotional programs.

Heritage Tourism

Heritage Tourism is an economic development strategy that attempts to increase visits by persons from outside the area who are interested in the historical or lifestyle offerings of the community. Heritage Tourism emphasizes the linkages and interconnections between the area's physical features (rivers, streams, forests, and wildlife) and its cultural features such as roads, buildings, towns, history, art, etc. Nationwide studies have determined that cultural landscapes and regions with special natural and historic qualities are among the most important attractions to tourists (Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway Resource report, 1994).

Recognizing the potential benefits of "eco-tourism," the Maryland Legislature passed House Bill 1, entitled "Heritage Preservation and Tourism Areas," in April 1996. Among other things this legislation authorizes grant and loan funds for planning, design,

development, preservation, restoration, interpretation, marketing, and programming of certified heritage areas. In addition, the legislation expands the local jurisdiction's authorized income tax credits for qualified rehabilitation of properties included in the boundaries of a certified Heritage Area. These heritage areas are identifiable and significant landscapes that are the focus of cooperative public and private efforts to recognize, organize, and communicate a community's natural, cultural, recreational, and economic attributes to stimulate the local economy and improve the quality of life.

It is recommended that the Town discuss including North East in the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway area with the Board of Directors of Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway. The heritage area designation has many tangible benefits, some of which include:

- Increased visitor spending. Heritage tourism projects attract more visitors, with higher incomes, for longer trips, making more repeat visits.
- Shared resources. Heritage tourism projects increase the amount of funds available to accomplish projects. They increase a community's ability to compete more effectively for outside money.
- Alternatives to homogenizing tourism. Heritage tourism offers alternatives to sprawl-types of tourism, instead focusing on a "sense of place," allowing North East to preserve its social character and environmental resources.

The focus of heritage tourism will be on the Central Business District with the shops and restaurants which attract such tourists. Heritage tourism will bring business to the heart of the local economy and possible funding for rehabilitation of the area.

Heritage tourism can be facilitated and enhanced by greenways. The combination will allow North East to capitalize on its recreational opportunities and small town charm. Heritage tourism and greenways have the potential to strengthen revitalization efforts in the Central Business District, while at the same time providing a service for the Town's residents by giving them a place to walk and bike.