



**VISTA 2025 Goal 3:**

***Expand business attraction and retention efforts with a focus on targeted industry clusters***

**Goal 3 Team Meeting**

**March 29, 2016**

**Meeting Notes**

**Team Members Attending:** Chris Alonzo, Mike Bray, Bill Bogle, Tom Fillippo, Marilyn Hershey, Roger Legg, Dan Miller, Mark Rupsis

**Also Attending:** Marybeth DiVincenzo, Mike Grigalonis, Hillary Krumrich, David Sciocchetti, Mary Frances McGarrity, Gary Smith

**Mark Rupsis**

Welcomed those in attendance and invited them to introduce themselves. Asked if there were any comments on the meeting notes from the previous meeting. None were presented.

**Mike Bray**

Stated that the meeting would focus on four strategies in terms of priorities and a focus on what we can move forward.

**Mike Grigalonis**

Summarized the “Take the Pulse” survey process noting that the survey was conducted in January and February, that the effort was a partnership with the County chambers and that 419 responses were received. He added that the results would serve as a benchmark for future surveys and noted that we were working towards a spring release of the full results.

**Mary Frances McGarrity**

Commented that the survey generated a high level of quality of respondents.

**David Sciocchetti**

Highlighted some of the findings of the survey. Respondents were mostly small businesses who had been located in the county for some time and were here because they started here. The majority of the respondents felt that the county economy was stable or improving. He noted that some of the key factors identified by the business community as important to their business were “quality of place” issues.

**Mark Rupsis**

Asked about the way the results on the effects on business were calculated and was advised that a weighted average was used. He indicated some surprise that the most important issues affecting businesses in Chester County were “quality of place” type issues not business issues.

**Tom Fillippo**

Noted that upwards of 2,000 new housing units were going up in Chester County and questioned whether there would be jobs for all the new residents.

**Mark Rupsis**

Noted that Chester County was the fastest growing county in the region and that County residents worked both in the County and throughout the region.

**Mike Bray**

Stated that a “live, work and play” environment was an increasingly popular trend but questioned where the millennials will choose to live as they get older. He added that Liberty Property Trust was already addressing this new demand with changes to their corporate office parks.

**Gary Smith**

Commented that it was a challenge for the future that the industrial and commercial land in the County was disappearing, often times being converted to residential. He questioned where future economic growth would be located. He also noted that telecommuting was impacting the amount of physical space needed by businesses. He considered the current situation an alarm signal in that we were “eating our seed corn” in a way that was not sustainable.

**David Sciocchetti**

Commented that Mark Lautman, the keynote speaker at the recent Workforce Summit, presented a formula that was “economy greater than population” to argue that unless there was economic growth communities would tend to struggle. He noted that Mr. Lautman also highlighted the emerging “freelance economy” as a major change that was already underway.

**Bill Bogle**

Asked if the freelance economy was being tracked and was advised that good data was hard to come by.

**Marybeth DiVincenzo**

Noted that good data was an increasingly important target to help foster good decisions. Added that a question on this topic could be added to the next survey.

**David Sciocchetti**

Noted that initial analysis of responses to some questions on the survey suggested they could represent different meanings in the minds of the respondents. He specifically mentioned the phrase “new business growth”

**Chris Alonzo**

Stated that to him it was new customers.

**Marilyn Hershey**

Commented that was improvement to the bottom line.

**Mike Bray**

Asked if the data could be cross-tabulated to drill down further into the data suggesting that there might be differences in the responses of small businesses and larger businesses or new companies as compared to established companies.

**Mary France McGarrity**

Noted that we plan to release a generic and county wide report but that additional research on the data was certainly possible.

**Chris Alonzo**

Stated that cross-tabbing can help identify trends and point out areas where we can help or focus efforts.

**Mike Bray**

Commented on the importance of good data adding that we now had a valuable resource and we need to analyze it and act on it. He added that it was important to get the initial results out and then work on the additional analysis.

**Mark Rupsis**

Noted the value of the feedback from the team and then switched focus to the next topic on the agenda.

**Jodi Gauker**

Commented on the need for Ag focus groups as a way of determining the real needs of the different segments of the Ag community. She noted issues like the technology of the dairy and mushroom industries and the need for addressing zoning and regulatory issues associated with direct sales and marketing by farmers. She added that we would be looking for people interested in specific topics and asked to be advised if team members knew someone who should be included.

**Dan Miller**

Noted that the Farm Bureau was working with the Octoraro School District to support their agricultural education program which had challenges. He also commented on the need for VISTA 2025 to be a living document focused on the issues critical to the Ag community in the County. He added that the Farm Bureau participated in an event at the Octoraro School District designed to give voice to the concerns of the ag community and what it needs going forward. He stated that they received a wealth of information and would share it once it had been analyzed.

**Mark Rupsis**

Stated that this sounded like a form of focus group.

**Dan Miller**

Described it as a listening session.

**Marilyn Hershey**

Noted that it was very well attended and had good participation.

**Mark Rupsis**

Asked about the regulatory issues impacting Ag.

**Hillary Krumrich**

Responded that this was an ongoing issue that the Chester County Planning Commission was working on in cooperation with the Chester County Association of Township Officials.

**Mark Rupsis**

Questioned whether a new group was needed.

**Jodi Gauker**

Suggested that it was because Ag Connect was regional and not as focused on the specific issues of Chester County.

**Dan Miller**

Noted that farmers are very independent and this makes it difficult to bring them together adding that all of the groups serving the Ag community have different missions.

**Gary Smith**

Commented on the approach that CCEDC has taken of looking at Ag as economic development and farming as a business. This led to programs to help farmers with their business adding that VISTA is an extension of that process and provides a unique opportunity to bring many Ag groups together.

**Mark Rupsis**

Noted that we can work offline to bring this new group together.

**Hillary Krumrich**

Commented that there is informal cooperation but that a more formal vehicle would be helpful.

**Chris Alonzo**

It is important that groups identify issues but especially important that they identify solutions and not just talk about challenges.

**Marybeth DiVincenzo**

Discussed the industry partnership model that requires all participants to get involved and contribute their resources.

**Dan Miller**

Suggested that the long discussed “Ag center” might be a topic for the new group.

**David Sciocchetti**

Provided an overview of the major industry sectors in Chester County using data from the VISTA 2025 report. He asked if there were other sectors that team members felt deserved attention.

**Mike Bray**

Commented that these are not just advisory groups as they are segments of the County economy that can be brought together to leverage their collective efforts to focus on solutions.

**Mark Rupsis**

Asked what the “to do” was in relation to the County’s industry sectors and who will do it. Suggested that team members should bring ideas on potential industry cluster opportunities to the next meeting. He suggested that perhaps the group could get together again in late April or early May in advance of the next meeting.

He then adjourned the meeting.

**Action Items**

- Convene group of ag service providers
- Farm Bureau to share results of recent ag "listening session"
- CCEDC to bring list key industries and potential industry cluster opportunities