



EMERGE2040

Highlighting strides being taken to create the Thriving, Green, Educated, Livable and Connected region envisioned by the community in the Destination Erie plan

DECEMBER 2016



Downtown is shaping up

Erie's downtown development received a boost in recent weeks, with a string of announcements signaling progress on several projects.

[Erie Insurance](#) in November announced plans to invest \$135 million in a new 346,000-square-foot, LEED-certified building that will expand the company's downtown Erie footprint. Construction is expected to begin in spring on the seven-story building, which will add office space and potentially allow the Erie-headquartered company to add up to 600 new employees, officials said.

The announcement followed two developments that promise to transform Erie's downtown:

In October, [Scott Enterprises'](#) planned Harbor Place development on Erie's east Bayfront received a \$5 million infusion from the [Pennsylvania Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program](#). Scott Enterprises expects to begin work on the 12-acre, \$150 million project — which will feature a mix of commercial and residential spaces — in 2017.

Also in October, the [Mercyhurst University](#)-led Downtown Erie Innovation District received a \$4 million grant from the [Erie Community Foundation](#), the [Susan Hirt Hagen Fund for Transformational](#)

[Philanthropy](#) and the [Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority](#) — part of \$10 million awarded by the groups. The Innovation District aims to create a hub of cyber security businesses downtown, with Mercyhurst partnering with Erie Insurance, McManis & Monsalve Associates and Velocity Network to attract new businesses and support amenities to appeal to the millennial market.

These announcements signal valuable investments in the community and align with the priorities established in municipal-level and neighborhood-level comprehensive plans — along with Emerge 2040 priorities.

[Emerge 2040](#) calls for focusing new development in Erie County's urban areas and for encouraging innovation among new and existing businesses. [Erie Refocused](#), the city of Erie's comprehensive plan, calls for the creation of downtown "districts" as well as a prioritization of mixed-use Bayfront developments. The [Downtown Master Plan](#) further envisions distinct districts, designed to work in concert to shore up the area from the Bayfront to 14th Street with a mix of residential and retail space, as well as businesses and entertainment.

Erie comes together

A NOTE FROM ANNA FRANTZ, EMERGE 2040 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Emerge 2040 was excited to participate in the seventh annual Erie Together Community Forum on November 15. The focus of the event, which attracted nearly 400 people, was a discussion among representatives from several of Erie's community-driven efforts to create a thriving region: [Erie Together](#), the [Erie County Department of Health](#), [Unified Erie](#), [Erie Refocused](#) and [Emerge 2040](#). The Erie Together annual events — and the Erie Together movement itself — embody a key EmERGE 2040 goal of maximizing civic participation to transform the Erie region.

The goal of the conversation was to illuminate how the various approaches undertaken by each of these community initiatives are together addressing priority community issues, particularly poverty. The conversation covered five significant challenges facing the region: violence; educational attainment/educational deficit; unemployment and the job/skills mismatch; community disinvestment; and community disconnect. As a group, we thoroughly delved into each issue, talking about the challenges from a range of perspectives as well as the connections among them. We highlighted a few of the recent successes brought about by collaborative efforts, as well as



efforts that are in progress.

It was a lively conversation that generated positive responses from the audience and others in the days that have followed. From my perspective, there were a few important takeaways:

- The issues faced by our community are extraordinarily complex, and there is no single answer to solving any of Erie's challenges. Most of the topics we covered are being addressed in many ways, using strategies that complement each other. However, it is clear that there are tremendous resources in this community that can be used to address these issues through improved coordination of local efforts, and this is what most of these initiatives are focused on.

- The strong turnout at the event reinforced that Erie County residents want to understand the forces that are shaping our community, and to help define our path forward. This was no surprise, based on the strong participation of residents

throughout the Destination Erie process. Attendance at the forum and the responses received afterwards were great reminders that as a community we must continue to find ways to inform, engage, and learn from each other in the region.

- There are a variety of ways to get involved in these efforts. Erie Together has posted a "Call to Action" on its [website](#) for people wanting to be a part of Erie's transformation.

Here at EmERGE 2040, we are committed to working more closely with Erie Together as well as the other efforts represented at the forum. The discussion helped to demonstrate how those relationships benefit community, and the questions from attendees indicated an interest in learning more and building on the conversation. One of our first joint tasks will be to respond to the questions raised at the forum, and to post the responses on Erie Together's [website](#) – check for those soon!

TAKE 5

Melinda Meyer, chair of Preservation Erie, answers questions about the Erie County Cultural Heritage Plan, a recommendation from the Destination Erie plan being implemented by Preservation Erie and the Erie County Department of Planning.

1 How did the Erie County Cultural Heritage Plan come about?

The ongoing loss of treasured structures like Koehler Brewery, and the questionable impact it was having in our communities, sparked discussion about strategies to encourage preservation and reuse of historic structures. And because historic preservation planning almost always begins with an inventory of historic assets, this is how the initial effort began. With the support of the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority, Perry 200 Commission, Erie Community Foundation, Erie County Planning Department and municipalities and heritage organizations, Preservation Erie and Wise Preservation Planning Inc. completed a countywide inventory of historic resources in 2014. The countywide historic resource inventory is Phase 1 of the planning effort, and Phase 2 is development of the plan itself.

In 2015, the [Erie County Planning Department](#) and [Preservation Erie](#) formed a partnership and began securing funds to develop a Cultural Heritage Plan to be considered for adoption by County Council. ... The plan will develop an action plan to preserve historic resources — for example, buildings and other structures that have played an

important role in Erie's heritage and development.

2 What is the goal of the ECCHP? Although Erie can boast of individual success stories such as the restorative conversion of the former Penelec Front Street Generating Station into the Erie Maritime Museum, little attempt has been made to forge a strategy that might advance a broad, sustained and potentially transformational regional historic preservation effort. ... The goal is to develop a countywide preservation plan that is useful and meaningful to Erie County, local municipalities and residents. The overall impact is a change to laws, policies and procedures that significantly improve historic preservation efforts and investments in order to create more exceptional places to live, work and visit.

3 What are some of the community assets that you expect to be included in the plan? Based on responses thus far, it is anticipated that the Erie County community will identify some of the following as historic assets or resources to be addressed in the plan: agricultural/viticultural landscapes and structures, such as barns; town centers/main thoroughfares; industrial complexes; museums and heritage sites; fairs and festivals;

covered bridges; cemeteries; iconic structures like the Eagle Hotel; ethnic social clubs/halls; places of worship; maritime structures; public buildings; prehistoric and archaeological remnants; and parks.

4 How does this tie into Emerge 2040 priorities?

One of the recommendations of the Emerge 2040 "vision" is to develop a historic preservation plan for Erie County. The existing historic resource component of the comprehensive plan for Erie County is 13 years old and is no longer adequate to support the strategic goals of our region. Per Emerge 2040, the Cultural Heritage Plan can be used to assist in the development of localized historic preservation plans that can be adopted by the county's 38 municipalities.

5 What are the next steps for the ECCHP?

The Planning Department and Preservation Erie are seeking public input on the plan from an [online survey](#) and at public engagement meetings on December 14. Over the 18-month planning period, Preservation Erie and the Planning Department will work with the Cultural Heritage Plan Task Force, which includes representatives from area municipalities, colleges, agencies, historical societies and other community groups.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT ...



Erie Innovation Fund: The Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority and Ben Franklin Technology Partners in November joined together to relaunch the Erie Innovation Fund, with \$1 million dedicated to help local startups and small manufacturers. [Read more at GoErie.com.](#)

Erie's food desert solution: Small grocery stores popping up on Erie's east side, owned and operated by some of Erie's refugees, are helping to solve the city's food desert problem by offering fresh, nutritious food options. [Read more and hear the report at PRI.org.](#)

Erie Land Bank: Erie City Council in November approved the creation of a land bank to deal with blight, which was identified as a key issue in the Erie Refocused comprehensive plan. [Read more at GoErie.com.](#)

DON'T MISS IT

- **Cultural Heritage Plan public meetings:** The Erie County Department of Planning and Preservation Erie are holding public engagement meetings on the new Erie County Cultural Heritage Plan. The meetings are scheduled for three sites around the county, all on Wednesday, December 14: 10 a.m., at Edinboro Borough Building, 124 Meadville St., Edinboro; 2 p.m., Girard Borough Social Hall, 34 Main St. W., Girard; and 6 p.m., Erie Art Museum, 411 State St. (use East Fifth Street entrance).

HOW CAN WE HELP?

If your organization would like a presentation or discussion about Emerge 2040, contact us at afrantz@eriepa.com.

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