

The INSTITUTE for

Public Policy & Economic Development

Volume 8 Issue 4

Summer 2012



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Committed to
research
and analysis
leading to
economic
development in
Pennsylvania

The Institute's Task Forces

The Institute has six task forces, which look at different aspects of life and work in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The Task Forces and their missions are:

- **Energy Task Force**—Mission: To convene community resources to strategically plan and promote the sustainable economic development of regional natural gas resources across business, education, political, and community stakeholders.
- **Jobs, Economy & Economic Development Task Force**—Mission: To improve the quality of life and standard of living for the residents of northeastern Pennsylvania through Pre-K-20+ educators and workforce development professionals partnering with business to create seamless, high quality NEPA education system.
- **Health & Healthcare Task Force**—Mission: To improve the quality of life and standard of living for the residents of northeastern Pennsylvania through examination of health status, health care delivery, health care costs and insurance.
- **Housing Task Force**—Mission: To improve the quality of life and standard of living for the residents of northeastern Pennsylvania through examination of housing stock and housing affordability.
- **Education and Workforce Development Task Force**—Mission: To improve the quality of life and standard of living for the residents of northeastern Pennsylvania through Pre-K-20+ educators and workforce development professionals partnering with business to create seamless, high quality NEPA education system.
- **Planning, Land Use and Infrastructure Task Force**—Mission: To improve the quality of life and standard of living for the residents of northeastern Pennsylvania through examination of best practices and policy in planning, land use, transportation, and infrastructure development.

2012 Task Force Work

Each year, the task force release policy statements or reports on issues impacting the region in hopes of encouraging meaningful legislation or regulation. Additionally, the research provides organizations with data to make informed decisions for problem solving and to evaluate best practices for possible. The Institute compiles these reports into a booklet that is released with our annual Indicators Report. Summaries of this year's reports are below.

Energy — The Energy Task Force was formed in the Spring of 2012. At the end of May, the task force facilitated a roundtable discussion between the natural gas industry and the business and education community to identify both economic and education/workforce opportunities. With that initial meeting, The Institute developed a two prong approach. The first is to prepare a regional economic development that the region can adopt for business attraction, expansion, and startup. The second is an education strategy that the Great Valley Technology Alliance will assist in coordinating. The education component will bring educators and industry together to evaluate opportunities to address industry needs through a comprehensive education program developed and implemented by the region's higher education infrastructure. The first meeting is scheduled for late August.

Jobs Economy & Economic Development (JEED) — JEED put out two policy statements this year. The first policy statement focuses on the economic impacts of corporate tax loopholes in Pennsylvania. With the Commonwealth facing budget shortfalls that threaten funding to social services, education, and health care, the need to keep money in Pennsylvania is greater than ever. Local municipalities are struggling to provide basic services and residents' cost of living has increased faster than income. An effective means of stabilizing revenue is preventing the use of legal loopholes to avoid taxation. The policy statements include making corporations more accountable when filing corporate taxes and companies to combining revenues, including those of subsidiaries, to ensure that their share of taxes are paid.

Jobs Economy & Economic Development (JEED) — The task force put out a second policy statement on fragmentation in the region. Pennsylvania is a state that exhibits fragmentation on a number of levels, which affects both its public and non-profit sectors. Such fragmentation results in duplicitous efforts, undermining of economic stabilization and wasteful spending. In north-eastern Pennsylvania (NEPA), residents often do not work in the same town in which they live in, nor do they buy all their goods and services in a single jurisdiction. While the region has changed, its governmental and non-profit framework have not kept pace. The municipalities within NEPA need to come together and work as a region. With the state and federal government at a loss to assist municipal governments as their own fiscal issues take center stage, communities around the country are working together as regions to harness their collective power to solve problems. Policy recommendations include implementation of the Bi-County Comprehensive plan and regional police and fire forces.

Health & Healthcare — This task force did not produce a policy statement. Instead the members developed a plan to complete a regional study on patient perception based on a pilot study done by The Institute in 2011. The data from that pilot study confirmed that Lackawanna County is losing patients to other regions, with 82% of respondents having sought healthcare outside the county in the past twelve months. The data also point to hospital/doctor performance and reputation as the reasons patients are seeking care elsewhere. Only 13% of respondents rated healthcare in Lackawanna County as "Excellent." An overwhelming number, 84%, felt that even though the services were available in Lackawanna County the quality of care would be better elsewhere. With hospitals serving as a vital part of the economy in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, these numbers are troubling. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health, in 2010 hospitals in Lackawanna County employed over 5,000 full and part time workers While Luzerne community hospitals employ over 7,000. The direct, indirect, and induced benefit of their employment to northeastern Pennsylvania is in the millions of dollars. Returning healthcare exports to the region stabilizes the existing health care infrastructure and gives it an opportunity to expand.

Housing — The Housing Task Force produced a policy statement on the possible use of Inclusionary Zoning to provide affordable housing in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties. The statement concluded, in part, that there are some elements that can be taken from successful IZ ordinances from other parts of the US. Counties and municipalities in Northeastern Pennsylvania, which may be unaware of potential exclusionary zoning ordinances on their books, should be made aware of how to make changes that would benefit low and middle income residents. In the cases where counties and municipalities do not work to improve the diversity of housing options through zoning, developers should be made aware of the builder's remedy. Information and support should be provided to guide those developers through the process. This is the first of papers to be added to a "Housing Toolkit."

2012 Task Force Work

Education & Workforce Development — This task force looked at student assessments through standardized testing. The task force found that there is currently, too much emphasis is placed on standardized testing. It has become the mechanism to determine a school's funding, to compare students, and evaluate overall school performance. Given the narrow parameters of standardized tests, this tool should not be the single determining factor in funding, school or teacher evaluation or student performance. This emphasis could cause schools to “teach to the test” as oppose to teaching content. This is a losing proposition for all involved. Standardized testing should be a component of evaluating progress or for use in comparisons. Emphasis should be on student performance, not comparisons. Student performance should also be a component of teacher evaluation. The second statement in this series, focusing on teacher evaluations, will be released this fall.

Planning, Land Use and Infrastructure (PLuTI) — The PLuTI Task Force looked at the forming a regional transportation authority in the region. After weighing the challenges and benefits, the task force concluded that it supports the formation of an RTA that encompasses the air, bus, and rail transportation. Given the economic interdependence of Lackawanna and Luzerne County, the commuter patterns of residents between the two counties, the number of residents who leave the region daily for employment, and the continued challenge of attracting more air carriers and flights, an RTA designation would enhance the integration of all modes of transit under which would be a combined transit authority and a stronger competitor for state and federal funding. The RTA should not only include representatives from the different modes of transportation, but also have geographical balance (from Carbondale in the north to Hazleton in the south), work collaboratively with the MPO and provide service to meet consumer demand. A regional RTA would also allow for increased operating efficiencies and create a regional system that addresses Northeast Pennsylvania's workforce needs.

Upcoming Community Based Research

The Institute is working on updating several of our community based research projects, which will be available on our website this fall.

Economy Tracker — The Institute is working to update and expand our economy tracker to include more counties. The tracker looks at a variety of demographic and financial data, including newly released migration data, to give an overall picture of the economy in the region.

Birth and Death Analysis — The birth and death analysis looks at the births and deaths in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties to track population changes.

Update of Marcellus Shale Primer — The Institute is updating the primer on Marcellus Shale, originally completed in 2008 with funding from the National Energy Technology Labs and URS through Wilkes' Institute for Energy and Environmental Research. The update will include not only data for shale plays in Texas and Arkansas but also Oklahoma and Louisiana. The original primer can be found at <http://www.institutepa.org/PDF/Marcellus/mtwhitepaper.pdf> .

All of the Institute's previous community based research is available on our website at http://www.institutepa.org/community_based_research.html . If you have question about upcoming projects, please contact us at info@institutepa.org.

Wells Fargo Donation Check to The Institute



In June, Wells Fargo presented The Institute with a generous donation to support our Housing Initiative. Pictured are Kevin Engelman, District Manager, Wilkes-Barre Market; Teri Ooms, Executive Director of The Institute and Greg Collins, Community Bank President - Northeastern Pennsylvania Region.

For more information on the initiative visit <http://www.nepahousing.org/>.

Research Symposium Abstract Released

The 2012 Northeastern Pennsylvania Research Symposium Proceedings are now available on our website at <http://www.institutepa.org/PDF/FacultyResearch/proceedings12.pdf>.

Summer 2012 Intern Update

The Institute would like to thank our summer interns for their hard work this semester! We wish them the best in all their future endeavors. Our interns this semester were:

Brandi George –Kings College
Kelsie Mcnamara—Misericordia University
Michael Mikolajczyk –Misericordia University
Kevin Watters –Lafayette College

The Institute would also like to thank **Shomik Ghosh**, who was our first High School Scholar this summer. The High School Scholar program will continue each summer, choosing one outstanding local high school student to complete 40 hours of work during a one month period. The goal of the program is to give high school students practical experience in basic data collection and analysis.

The Institute has internships available for the fall 2012 semester. Internships are available to students of any of our nine member institutions, who are in or entering their Senior year. Students of any academic major, with a 3.2 GPA or higher may apply to work in either our Wilkes-Barre or Scranton offices. For more information on our internship program or the High School Scholars program, please contact Kate Wassel at 570-408-9850 or Wassel@institutepa.org.

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The Institute provides research, technical assistance, and facilitation and convening services to the private and public sector to:

- analyze components for regional prosperity
- create state and local government development strategies
- market studies
- feasibility studies
- impact reports

Research areas include:

- demographics
- economic development projects and planning
- community development
- education
- workforce development
- health and healthcare
- best practices
- innovation indicators
- economic indicators
- tourism and arts & culture

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