

# Penn State Extension

*These notes are a DRAFT of the public comments from our first strategic planning session on May 30th. We need your thoughts and ideas, and will add them to these notes before our next meeting on Thursday July 11, 6 p.m. at Mount Union High School.*

The Strategic Plan has been commissioned by the Borough of Mount Union, and is being facilitated by Judy Chambers, Penn State Extension [chambers@psu.edu](mailto:chambers@psu.edu). These notes are being shared widely with the community through the Borough, the Mount Union School District, Planet Lovejoy and other outlets. Please add your thoughts by emailing them to Borough Council c/o [dsyocum817@yahoo.com](mailto:dsyocum817@yahoo.com) or [planetlovejoy@gmail.com](mailto:planetlovejoy@gmail.com)

## What are Mount Union's assets?

- People of Mount Union: hard-working, caring and giving
- Diverse population in terms of race, religion and ethnicity
- Civic pride
- Heritage and history as a competitive manufacturing hub
- Trails: Great Eastern, Standing Stone, Thousand Steps
- Opportunities for hunting, fishing, river recreation
- A small base of stable employers with family-sustaining wages

- Geographic location within state and northeast region puts Mount Union between major commercial markets
- Mount Union High School serves as the community's center, and its administration is actively involved in the community
- Organized sports, band and other activities for youth
- Planet Lovejoy
- Mount Union library has been sustained by volunteers
- Housing stock is inexpensive
- Public housing provides a source of volunteers, some housing for senior citizens, and much of the benefit funds is spent locally

## What are Mount Union's challenges?

- Isolation, both physical and perceived
- Lack of businesses and employers
- Economic conditions. Mount Union will lag behind the nation in recovering from the recession
- Downtown deterioration, appearance of many buildings is uninviting
- Competition from big box stores like Wal-Mart
- Deteriorating infrastructure: streets and sidewalks in poor condition. Water and sewer systems are under growth restrictions, internet connectivity not consistently available
- Former Mount Union Elementary School is under-utilized
- Many families are in need of community services

- Large public housing presence, with 4 developments
- High % of low-moderate income families
- Low % of owner-occupied homes. More than half the housing units in Mount Union are rentals
- New development is limited by the sewer moratorium
- Shortage of quality housing, and little new development at high end of housing market
- Lack of good-paying jobs: available jobs pay low wages
- Homelessness
- Drug abuse

## What has changed in the past 10 years?

- People are more involved, more connected, and have more positive energy
- Investment in public education, in terms of physical buildings, technology, and elective programs
- Increased support for schools from PTA's
- Job losses: Owens Corning closed in Huntingdon, FCI closing this year
- Changing population primarily in public housing developments, increased student transiency

## What issues and opportunities should Mount Union address in the next five years?

(Small groups created lists of their top 3 choices, which have been combined in this list in no particular order)

- Tourism, arts and culture activities, farmer's market
- Public relations and promotion: change Mount Union's image both within and outside the community
- Use technology to improve community and employment opportunities
- Break the cycle of poverty through education
- Create more jobs with higher wages
- Infrastructure needs: water, sewer, transportation, housing and technology
- Build community fabric and create a networked community
- Property improvement
- Beautification

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# Ideas and opportunities – What can we do?

## Tourism

- Re-establish Broad Top Railroad to its original route through entire county
- Promote rail heritage
- Promote hunting, kayaking and fishing
- Create boat and kayak access
- River walk
- Promote Great Eastern Trail through Tourist Promotion Agency
- Find a way to connect to the Creation Festival
- Build relationships with county and state

## Jobs

- Encourage tourism businesses
- Promote local entrepreneurship
- Teach people how to start a business
- Micro-loans for small businesses
- Aggressively recruit businesses
- Tax breaks for business to entice business
- Hire people that want to live here, raise family here, contribute to community
- Restaurants
- Farmers market

## Infrastructure

- Fix Pennsylvania Avenue wall
- Funding for housing rehabilitation for responsible landowners
- Inspection of rentals – adopt ordinance
- Address sewer system issues

## Promotion and Image

- Commercials
- Facebook and website
- Promote the good
- Build relationships with local news
- Become Hug Town USA – give everyone a hug and welcome them

## Community Fabric

- Art Gallery
- Community Gardens
- Make High School central hub
- Connecting seniors with youth
- Sustainable library
- Promote the good

## Revitalization and Beautification

- River Walk bypass to behind Grace Community
- Connect trails: Fire Trail to Mount Union to Link Trail
- Rails and trails
- Pennsylvania Avenue wall
- Individuals encourages to clean, paint, spruce up their own properties both residential and businesses
- Mount Union Elementary School building
- Upgrade business areas through state grants – any funding available to help in this area