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## **Executive Summary**

Mercer County's Strategy 1000 Initiative developed in 1998 had a goal of preparing 1,000 acres of land for new or reuse economic development. The need to achieve this goal was further reinforced by historical industrial development trends that provide data to support that Mercer County does not have an adequate supply of readily available land to meet prospect demand in a favorable economic climate. Based on a projected absorption rate of 45 acres per year, and assuming favorable economic conditions, land demand could outpace land supply in as few as 4 years.

To further document the need to prepare additional property for economic development and to select particular sites for the County to focus its resources, the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) allocated funds to conduct a Target Location Assessment through an update to the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan. Gannett Fleming, Inc. (Gannett) was retained to complete the Comprehensive Plan update. Gannett retained Delta Development Group, Inc. (Delta) to conduct the Target Location Assessment.

In addition to a review of industrial absorption trends, MCRPC and Penn-Northwest Development Corporation (Penn-Northwest) identified several key economic development issues that prompted the preparation of this study. First, several significant recent plant closures have resulted in the loss of 1,285 jobs between 2000 and 2003. Second, declining County population combined with a natural population decrease (more deaths than births) has exacerbated the job losses. Finally, when economic development prospects consider Mercer County as a business location, sites with proper infrastructure and zoning are not readily available, resulting in missed job creation opportunities. There are available sites in Mercer County that have appropriate land controls and infrastructure; however, these sites are not often chosen by prospects in the current market place.

## **Methodology**

The goal of the Target Location Assessment, as established by MCRPC and Penn-Northwest, was to identify and rank three or four sites within Mercer County that can serve as the catalyst for implementing Strategy 1000 – preparing a new supply of shovel ready properties in Mercer County. Each site identified through Strategy 1000 was analyzed from a market perspective – identifying what type of development would potentially be considered at specific locations in Mercer County based on existing market conditions. To complete this study the following tasks were conducted:

- A forecast of property supply and demand to document the amount of land available for targeted industry use. Knowing the amount of land ready for development (*supply*), the level of industry interest in the sites (*demand*), and the projected rate of development (*absorption*) provide Mercer County with the information required to make decisions about future County economic development investments.

- An assessment of the current local, regional, and national markets and an assessment of future market opportunities.
- Identification of target industries to attract to priority sites, using absorption and market assessment data.
- Identify priority sites for future economic development by ranking each Strategy 1000 site with the assumption that each was properly zoned, with local and environmental approvals and ample infrastructure.
- Analyzing two of the sites for infrastructure, zoning, and preliminary environmental constraints in order to establish cost estimates for preparing a financial pro forma to demonstrate the return on investment.

### ***Key Findings to Support Priority Site Selection***

The following findings cumulatively support the need for and identification of the prioritized sites.

### **Forecast of Real Estate Supply and Demand**

- Based on a recently prepared absorption study, approximately 196 acres of available industrial land remains.
- Using a projected absorption rate of 45 acres per year, Mercer County could anticipate exhausting its industrial land in as few as 4 years.
- The location of the largest assemblage (40 %) of the County's available industrial land captured only 25 % of the County's absorption during the 1990s.
- Mercer County has received requests from prospects for large amounts of contiguous land near interstate interchanges but has no available land to site these opportunities.
- To actively contribute to the region's available economic development land resources, Mercer County should prepare an ample supply of industrial land.
- Review of available data indicates that Mercer County does not have a sufficient supply of industrial land.
- Mercer County should assemble an additional supply of industrial land, which is of sufficient size and properly located to accommodate future land demand.

### **Market Assessment and Future Market Opportunities**

- Mercer County's transportation infrastructure is a significant market strength.
- Mercer County is in the "path of progress" as land development and population patterns move north from the Pittsburgh metropolitan area toward the southeast portion of the County. With lower housing costs and excellent transportation assets, Mercer County should position itself with real estate assets and amenities that would be attractive to new businesses, including those that employ knowledge workers in Information and Professional and Business Services sectors.
- Jobs created in the Information and Professional and Business Services sectors would provide a level of diversification required to maintain a balanced economy and likely bring higher wages and additional residents to the County. These sectors are projected to grow in future years.
- The high concentration of manufacturing in Mercer County creates opportunity for developing partnerships to conduct research and development to re-engineer the County's manufacturing sector. This would provide local companies with additional tools and opportunities to develop niche-manufacturing markets.

### **Target Industries**

- The following target industries, identified using the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), should be promoted and encouraged by Mercer County. With proper economic development support and availability of sufficiently sized land with ample infrastructure and amenities, these industries are expected to bring new jobs and residents to the County:
  - Education and Health Services
  - Professional and Business Services
  - Information
  - Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities
  - Manufacturing
- Supporting the Manufacturing and Transportation sectors requires large, contiguous tracts of industrial land.

- Supporting the remaining industry sectors requires assembling planned development(s) to attract workers employed in these sectors and to position the surrounding communities to receive spin off development from these workers - potential County residents that will help to reverse the current pattern of out migration.
- To attract new companies, associated jobs and residents, Mercer County should consider developing a planned business park that would include office, retail, and recreational amenities.
- Capitalizing on the academic strengths of educational institutions serving Mercer County by developing private-public-educational partnerships would support target industry development at a prioritized site.

### ***Priority Sites***

The market based criterion identified as the site selection factors that were used to determine the priority sites are relatively consistent with national site selection factors and Mercer County prospect requirements. These factors included: proximity to a major transportation corridor, sufficiently sized land; proximity to the 'path of progress'; location in close proximity to I-80; availability of a qualified workforce; and proximity to service amenities.

The following sites, listed in order of market priority, have been selected as target locations to serve as the catalyst for implementing Strategy 1000.

1. Exit 15 - I-80
2. Exit 113 - I-79/PA 208
3. Exit 4 - I-80/PA60/PA318

The locations of the Strategy 1000 sites and the Priority Sites are shown on *Map 1* (page 39) and *Map 2* (page 47), respectively.

Detailed site investigations were not conducted as part of this study. Therefore, detailed site investigations should be conducted prior to considering any of the sites to fulfill the objectives of Strategy 1000.

### ***Development Feasibility of Priority Sites***

Development Feasibility identifies Mercer County's return on investment at each site. As directed by MCRPC and Penn-Northwest, Development Feasibility was conducted for the Exit 4 - I-80 site and the Exit 15 - I-80 site. Results are summarized below.

**Exit 4 – I-80**

The Exit 4 site general economic parameters are as follows:

- A favorable economic climate
- Total development cost of \$11,803,548
- 100 % debt
- Projected annual absorption of 45 acres
- Market sales price per acre of \$20,000
- Annual Revenue of \$900,000
- Cash Flow of \$53,134

**Exit 15 – I-80**

The Exit 15 site general economic parameters are as follows:

- A favorable economic climate
- Total development cost of \$19,470,108
- 100 % debt
- Projected annual absorption of 45 acres
- Market sales price per acre of \$30,000
- Annual Revenue of \$1,350,000
- Cash Flow of \$34,272

## Forecast of Real Estate Supply and Demand

### **Objectives**

Identifying current trends in the amount of land (*supply*) available to support industrial development in Mercer County and knowing the level of need for industry to use the land (*demand*) is necessary to forecast the amount of land that will be developed (*absorbed*) in future years. Projecting the rate of absorption will help Mercer County plan for future development over the next ten years (2005 – 2014).

Existing data to support the amount of *industrial* land that has been developed in Mercer County over the last 20 years was available but detailed absorption data regarding *additional wealth generating* industries - those industries that contain high paying jobs - was not readily available. Therefore, the majority of the data used to discuss supply, demand and absorption as well as Delta's projection of supply and demand is based on traditional industrial uses. National and regional trends discussed in the Market Assessment section recommend that the County attract additional wealth generating industries, beyond the manufacturing sector. This is necessary in order to diversify Mercer County's economy and will be discussed in the Target Industries portion of this report.

This section will provide answers to several basic questions regarding the existing and future use of industrial land in Mercer County:

- What are the recent trends regarding the amount of land developed, i.e. absorbed, in the County?
- What is the supply of existing industrial land in Mercer County as well as surrounding counties?
- What recent prospects and opportunities have driven the demand for land in Mercer County?
- What industry types are driving demand trends in Mercer County?
- Based on past trends and forecasted supply and demand, what rate of absorption can Mercer County anticipate over the next ten years?
- Based on supply, demand and absorption trends, is an adequate amount of land available over the next ten years to accommodate new industrial development?



## ***Industrial Land Absorption in Mercer County***

An industrial land absorption study prepared for the Northwest Regional Planning and Development Commission (Northwest Commission) in March 2002 documents historical absorption trends, as well as supply and demand, in Mercer County.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the report was to document the industrial land absorption in Keystone Opportunity Zones (KOZs) throughout Northwest Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup>

Several assumptions regarding how absorption would be defined were identified in the Northwest Commission report. 1) Data was presented as net land absorption and measured in acres. 2) The absorption calculation included companies purchasing sites and constructing new buildings or buying or leasing sites containing vacant building(s). 3) Redevelopment of Brownfield sites and new development of Greenfield sites were included in calculating absorption except when sites were vacated and redeveloped during the decade (1990s). In these instances, land was not classified as net land absorption because although the development was new it did not represent net new development. For consistency, Delta used these same assumptions when projecting absorption.

Mercer County's industrial absorption trends are as follows:

- Between 1990 and 1999 an estimated 1,657 acres of industrial land in Northwest Pennsylvania was improved (or absorbed). This amount was three times the amount of land absorbed during the 1980s.
- Mercer County had the 2nd highest rate of industrial land absorption in Northwest Pennsylvania during the 1990s (383 acres), second only to Erie County.
- The land absorption during the 1990s was 38 acres per year. The average annual absorption between 1990 and 1994 was 30 acres per year and the average annual absorption increased to 48 acres per year between 1995 and 2000.
- The amount of land absorbed in Mercer County has been steadily increasing over the past two decades as shown in *Table 1*.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Patz and Associates, Inc. Industrial Land Absorption Study, Keystone Opportunity Zones, Northwest Pennsylvania. March 2002.

<sup>2</sup> The following counties were included in the study: Butler, Crawford, Clarion, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Warren, and Venango.

Table 1

Trends in Industrial Land Absorption (Acres) in Mercer County, 1980 - 1999		
	Total Acres	Annual Average
1980 – 84	34	6.8
1985 – 89	133	26.6
1990 – 94	143	28.6
1995 – 99	240	48.0

Source: S. Patz and Associates, Inc. Industrial Land Absorption Study, Keystone Opportunity Zones, Northwest Pennsylvania, p. 51.

- The majority of industrial land absorbed during the 1990s was in the Shenango Valley indicating that the land demand was concentrated in this portion of the County (Table 2).

Table 2

Industrial Land Absorption by Submarket Mercer County, 1990 - 1999		
	Total Acres Developed	% of Total
I-79 Corridor	35	9.1
Shenango Valley	166	43.3
Greenville Area	126	32.9
Other	56	14.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: S. Patz and Associates, Inc. Industrial Land Absorption Study, Keystone Opportunity Zones, Northwest Pennsylvania, p. 56.

Between 2001 and 2002 the absorption rate was only 20 acres per year, much lower than the land absorption trends of the 1990s. Part of this trend reversal is due in part by a downturn in manufacturing along with a national recession.

As economic conditions are improving, having a *sufficient supply* of land to meet *future demand* will be critical.

### Land Supply in Mercer County

- Mercer County has a limited supply of land for industrial development.

According to the Northwest Commission absorption study, approximately 196 acres of industrial land is available for future industrial development. The specific properties that comprise the acreage are shown in *Table 3*.

**Table 3**  
**Available Industrial Park Land at Active and Proposed Properties**  
**in Mercer County**  
**(January 2004)**

Property	Total Acres	Available Acres
Jackson Commerce Center	100	45
Broadway South	36	0
Broadway North	25	25*
GRBPE	150	114
Kirila	38	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>196</b>

Source: PennNorthwest Development Corporation.

\*Property available 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2004.

Forty percent of the available industrial land is located in the Greenville Reynolds Development Corporation (GRDC) Industrial Parks; however, this park only captured 25 % of the market during the 1990s. As indicated previously, the majority of the land absorbed during the 1990s was in the Shenango Valley. This suggests that the supply of land is concentrated in an area that does not attract the majority of the land development.

Due to recent plant closures and downsizing, an additional source of land may be available. Between 2000 and 2003 a total of 21 businesses either closed or downsized in Mercer County. These properties may potentially be available as a future source of industrial land. Market factors, as discussed in the next section of this report, will dictate the reuse of the land.

Mercer County also has a supply of land available for professional and office uses. Recently opened, LindenPointe is a planned technical park in the City of Hermitage containing 116 acres. This park provides locations for future wealth generating industries beyond the manufacturing sector.

The impact of absorption on the existing supply of industrial land is quite concerning. Using a conservative estimate of 38 acres per year - the average amount of land absorbed during the 1990s - it would take only 5 *years* to absorb the remainder of Mercer County's available industrial land. Using a more aggressive estimate of 48 acres per year - the amount of land absorbed annually during the later half of the 1990s - it would take only 4 *years* to use the remaining available industrial land in Mercer County.<sup>3</sup>

- **Surrounding counties maintain an adequate supply of industrial land.**

Although Mercer County has excellent relationships with economic development organizations in surrounding Pennsylvania counties, it nonetheless competes for prospects on a regular basis. Therefore, if the County does not have an adequate supply of preferred land, it will not be able to actively contribute to the region's available economic development land resources.

Industrial property is readily available in counties surrounding Mercer County.<sup>4</sup> Several surrounding counties possess large tracts of land located in proximity to major interstates - characteristics that have been recently requested from Mercer County prospects.

- Crawford County - Keystone Regional Industrial Park to the north includes 1,220 acres of available land.
- Venango County - Barkeyville Industrial Park at Exit 29, I-80 includes 126 acres of available industrial land.
- Butler County - 250 acres of industrial land is available and new parks are being developed. This does not include 475 acres of land available at privately developed business parks in Cranberry Township.
- Lawrence County - 595 acres of industrial land is available with New Castle Development holding 400 acres of the available industrial land.
- Trumbull and Mahoning Counties - These counties are home to several manufacturing and logistics firms. Recently announced economic development projects total nearly \$1.2 billion in investment.<sup>5</sup> Available land for industrial and office development is in sufficient supply.

A limited supply of industrial land combined with the availability of land in surrounding counties documents in part the need to discuss the preparation of future properties.

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<sup>3</sup> These assumptions are based on the absorption study previously noted.

<sup>4</sup> With the exception of Trumbull and Mahoning Counties, data for this comparison was obtained from the Northwest Commission study.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.regionalchamber.com/ed-newfacilities.html>.

Understanding the level of land demand will further document the critical importance of land supply.

***Land Demand in Mercer County***

The current level of prospect activity by industry, prospect requirements such as land size and location, and the location of new development were considered in the discussion of land demand. The following trends were identified based on this information.

- **Manufacturing prospects drive demand in Mercer County.**

Manufacturing uses overwhelmingly drive the demand for industrial land in Mercer County. Between July 2002 and December 2003, Penn-Northwest Development Corporation received 72 prospect inquiries.<sup>6</sup> A total of 68.1 % of the prospects were manufacturing sector businesses (Table 4).

**Table 4**

**Mercer County Economic Development Prospects by Industry  
(July 2002 – December 2003)**

Industry Sector	Number of Prospects	% Of Total Prospects
Information	4	5.6
Manufacturing	49	68.1
Professional and Business Services	10	13.9
Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities	6	8.3
Unknown	3	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Note: Industry sector classified using NAICS.

Source: Penn-Northwest Development Corporation, Prospect Database. July 2002 – December 2003.

The Professional and Business Services; Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities; and Information sectors accounted for the remainder of Mercer County’s prospect activity.

<sup>6</sup> Penn-Northwest maintains a database for tracking prospect activity. Complete information pertaining to type of industry, number of jobs, investment, and acreage was not made available for several prospects. As such, reported results are presented in the aggregate.

Although the level of activity is not as high as manufacturing sectors, these industries provide wealth generating jobs and a level of diversification required to maintain a balanced economy. In addition, these industries, particularly the Information and Professional and Business Services sectors provide an opportunity to attract new residents to Mercer County, which will help to reverse the current pattern of out migration.

The level of potential investment represented by the prospect activity is \$50 million with job creation totaling 3,521.<sup>7</sup> The acreage required by these prospects totaled 1,956 acres. If Mercer County were to capture just 15 % of the prospect activity, it would utilize nearly all of its currently available industrial land.

- **Mercer County's available properties are not always attractive to current prospects**

Based on what current prospects are requesting (or land demand), the County's sites are not equally attractive. Common site selection factors identified by Mercer County prospects included:

- Proximity to major interstates
- Availability of skilled labor
- Working capital
- Availability of sufficiently sized land
- Ample infrastructure

Although skilled labor and competitive labor costs are readily available in Mercer County and state and local incentives are available for negotiation, many County sites are not located in proximity to major interstates. Several of Penn-Northwest's prospects are searching for large properties located in proximity to major interstates. At least four prospects requested contiguous land totaling over 100 acres. Mercer County does not currently have a supply of large properties with easy access to major highways.

The site selection factors identified by recent Mercer County prospects are relatively consistent with what corporate site selectors are requesting at the national level. *Area Development's* annual corporate surveys document top corporate site selection factors. The top five factors are listed in *Table 5*.

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<sup>7</sup> These numbers do not include an individual prospect with a projected investment of \$1.1 billion and a job projection number of 1,300. It was determined that including this prospect would skew the typical level of prospect activity received by Penn-Northwest.

**Table 5**

**Area Development Annual Corporate Survey  
Top Five Site Selection Factors  
(2001, 2002, 2003)**

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>2001 Factors</b>	<b>2002 Factors</b>	<b>2003 Factors</b>
1	Availability of skilled labor	Availability of skilled labor	State and local incentives
2	Labor costs	Labor costs	Labor costs
3	Highway accessibility	Tax exemptions	Availability of skilled labor
4	Energy and availability costs	State and local incentives	Highway accessibility
5	Availability of telecommunications services	Highway accessibility	Occupancy or construction costs

Source: *Area Development*. 2001 Corporate Survey, 2002 Corporate Survey and 2003 Corporate Survey.

- **Mercer County's industrial land development is predominantly from existing County businesses.**

Existing Mercer County businesses developed nearly 77 % of the industrial land during the 1990s (*Table 6*). The source of the growth was from the expansion of local companies into new locations. A total of 10.5 % included growth of existing company at existing sites.

**Table 6**

<b>Source of Industrial Land Demand</b>		
	<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Local Growth: New Sites	253	66.0
Local Growth: Existing Sites	40	10.5
New Companies (including startups)	90	23.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: S. Patz and Associates, Inc. Industrial Land Absorption Study, Keystone Opportunity Zones, Northwest Pennsylvania, p. 56.

Only 21 % of land absorption was from new companies moving into the County. Two of the new companies moving into the County accounted for some of the largest amounts of land demand during the 1990s. These businesses located in the Jackson Commerce Park due in part to availability of sufficiently sized land located in proximity to I-79. Developing a new supply of industrial land provides a tremendous opportunity to drive demand and attract new businesses, as well as future residents, to Mercer County.

***Projected Industrial Absorption Rate***

- **Mercer County’s absorption is projected at 45 acres per year.**

Delta projected an absorption rate of 45 acres per year between 2005 and 2014. The key assumption in this projection is a healthy economic climate. According to analysis completed for *Area Development’s* 2003 Corporate Survey the economic outlook is improving. “The U.S. economy is beginning to show some promising signs of cycling out of its sluggish recession. The steady rebound of the Dow Jones Industrial Index, the accelerated growth in GFDP, and the gradual drop in unemployment signal positive signs that the economy is on the mend.”<sup>8</sup>

Delta projects that 45 acres of absorption per year is achievable based on the following assumptions:

- The County will capture one-third of the absorption of the 1990s equating to 12.5 acres (38 acres x 33%) plus.
- The County will capture 5 % of its annual prospects with each prospect requiring an assumed 13 acres equating to 32.5 acres (50 prospects x 5% x 13 acres).

<sup>8</sup> *Area Development*, 2003 Corporate Survey. January 2004.



Applying 45 acres of industrial growth per year Mercer County could expect to develop 450 acres of land within the next 10 years (2005 – 2014). In twenty years, 900 acres of land would be absorbed.

Based on the projection of 45 acres absorbed per year, Mercer County has only 4 years of land capacity left to meet demand. Therefore, it is critical that Mercer County prepare an adequate supply of readily available industrial land to accommodate future prospects.

### ***Supply and Demand Conclusions and Recommendations***

- **Mercer County does not have a sufficient supply of industrial land.**

Based on the data presented, the supply of industrial land could easily out pace demand if the absorption trends of the 1990s, particularly the later half of the decade, continue through the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Using the projected industrial absorption rate of 45 acres per year and providing that economic conditions are favorable, the current supply of land will last only for 4 years.

To augment the existing inventory, additional land may be available at sites that companies have recently closed. However, it is uncertain when these properties will be back in the real estate market.

- **Mercer County should assemble an additional supply of industrial land, sufficiently sized and properly located to accommodate future land demand.**

Supply and demand trends document that available industrial land is not of sufficient size nor preferentially located to support a future land absorption projection of 45 acres per year. Several recent Mercer County prospects have required larger sized industrial land located near interstate interchanges. New industrial development is required to not only provide space for existing company expansion, which totals nearly 77 % of the new land development, but to accommodate the needs of new companies moving into the County. Attracting new businesses is necessary to continue the diversification of the County's economic base and bring new jobs and residents to the County.

While supply, demand and absorption trends provide an assessment of the *real estate* uses in Mercer County, the next step in this study – the Market Assessment – identifies trends from an *industry market* perspective. This provides the foundation for identifying specific industries to target at priority sites.

## Market Assessment

### *Objectives*

The objective of the Market Assessment is to present information that will assist Mercer County in matching local and regional resources and opportunities with innovative real estate uses, and to ensure that the end product meets the needs of the end user and is financially competitive in the local and regional marketplace.

The success of a development project depends on the existing demand or opportunities for the targeted use, the competition, the ability to market the product effectively, and the ability to design and finance the project so that the sale/lease price is competitive in the local and regional marketplace. The results of the market overview provide well-informed insight into these crucial factors and provide guidance to the County in determining the optimal mix and design of the real estate assets based on the business needs of the end user.

The tasks in the assessment were designed to answer the following questions:

- What is the “vision” of a developed project or site and what will it take to accomplish the vision?
- What are the economic trends in the community, the region, and the United States?
- What local assets, or developable resources can the community leverage to create new business opportunities?
- What regional or national growth trends can be matched to local assets or developable resources to create new business opportunities?
- What partnerships can be created to enhance business opportunities?
- What are the business needs of the end user?
- What is/are the most efficient, cost-effective site(s) on which to develop a project?
- What design characteristics will be competitive in the local market and meet the needs of the end user?
- What rent/lease rate structure is required in order to be competitive in the local market?
- What financial assumptions are required (grant and debt) to finance the development?

This section presents the results of the Market Assessment. Background data to support the results is located in *Appendix A*.

## **National Market Trends**

- **The national economy is recovering and strengthening from the recent national recession.**

The recent national recession led to a slowdown in the manufacturing sector, as indicated by a drop in production capacity at many U.S. plants. Officially declared in March 2001, the recession brought ten years of unprecedented economic expansion to a close and heralded in a new era for U.S. manufacturers. Because manufacturing activity is widely accepted as an indicator of economic stability, policy analysts and economists closely monitor this sector as a benchmark for the overall economy. A widely utilized index produced by the Institute for Supply Management (ISM) tracks the monthly performance of key industry variables, such as production, commodity prices, inventories, and employment. As early as August 2000, the ISM index had slipped below 50, an indication of a contracting economy. In the months to follow, the index continued its downward march, reaching levels that mirrored the 1991 recession.

While business activity began to increase in 2001, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) - a nationwide panel of economists that tracks business cycles - was hesitant to declare an end to the recession until enough time had passed that any future downturn in the economy would be considered a new recession. In July 2003, the NBER officially declared the end of the recession to have occurred in November 2001. In November 2003, the ISM index rose to a 20 year high of 62.8. With economic indicators going up, and jobless claims going down, it appears that the economy is strengthening and will continue to expand over the coming months. Even though the economy has been expanding for over two years, the expansion has not translated into new manufacturing jobs. In fact, the manufacturing sector is continuing to lose jobs.

- **The national decline in manufacturing impacts future land requirements and use.**

In today's economy, fewer major companies are looking for new locations or creating new jobs. In Pennsylvania communities, like communities across the U.S., many of the core manufacturing businesses were established prior to 1950 and are now operating in mature markets. While once vibrant and growing, these companies must modernize, consolidate or downsize their operations in order to stay competitive in the world market place, leaving communities with an unemployed or underemployed workforce and depreciated facilities that require extensive renovations to be put back into use. As manufacturing has declined, so has the demand for industrial parks located on the outskirts of communities. In addition, consolidations and restructuring have included changes in inventory methods and logistics needs resulting in greater demand for efficient distribution.

- **The majority of the nation’s jobs are being created by small businesses with land requirements that differ from traditional manufacturing industries.**

While companies in mature markets are consolidating and downsizing, new companies are being started and creating new jobs in response to new growth markets. It is estimated that 60% to 70% of all new jobs are created by small business. The Small Business Administration defines a small business as a business with annual sales of \$10,000,000 or less. More than 99% of American companies have fewer than 500 employees and nearly half of the workers in the U.S. are now employed by small businesses.

Many of the small businesses in today’s economy that are growing and creating new jobs are either service oriented, or are associated with a new technology or a “niche” market that large manufacturers are unable to serve. These businesses often share some of the same characteristics and needs: an unsupported business track record; a small capital base; continual need to upgrade equipment and train workforce; and flexible use of real estate – real estate that is not owned. Emerging businesses are no longer smokestack industries on the outskirts of towns and neo-traditional development (old-fashioned neighborhood centers that provide opportunities for people to live, work and play – all within walking distance) is emerging as a replacement for industrial parks located on the outskirts of town.

- **In the changing economy, attracting knowledge workers is critical to attracting companies.**

The focus in economic development today is changing from attracting *companies* to attracting *people*. In the old economy, prosperity was related to having a workforce that was skilled with their hands, with the idea of needing to be *cheaper* to be competitive. In the new economy, prosperity is related to having workers that are good with their minds, or the idea of needing to be *better* to be competitive. Most of these workers have completed at least two years of college and are employed in occupations such as information technology, managerial, professional, or technical.

A key to attracting knowledge workers is the availability of physical, social and cultural amenities. Communities need to adapt to the changing economy to provide the environment and amenities that will be attractive to the knowledge worker.

As today’s businesses become more technology oriented, the availability of technology infrastructure is becoming as important to business success as basic utilities and transportation access.

### **Local Economic and Demographic Trends**

The capacity of Mercer County to maintain and expand its economic base and to create new employment opportunities for its residents can be measured by four primary market factors:

1. The availability of an adequate workforce to support business growth
2. The strength and diversity of existing business and industry
3. Developable knowledge assets and entrepreneurial activity
4. Proximity to infrastructure (transportation, technology, utilities, etc.)

Existing Mercer County businesses echo these market factors as summarized in interviews conducted for the Pennsylvania Business Retention and Expansion Program. A summary is located in *Appendix B*.

- **Transportation is one of Mercer County's greatest assets.**

One of Mercer County's greatest assets opportunities lies in its location in relation to major transportation corridors. As businesses throughout the country improve processes to operate more efficiently and more effectively to meet consumer demands, inventory methods have changed, increasing the importance of transportation access. In Mercer County, I-79 provides easy access to the Butler and Pittsburgh areas with an average annual daily traffic count of 23,000. U.S. Highway 60 provides easy access to the Pittsburgh Airport area with an average annual daily traffic count of 11,000. I-80 provides easy east/west access across the southern portion of the county with an average annual daily traffic count of 26,000.

To test the theory of the importance of transportation access to business locations, the location of businesses in Mercer County and the surrounding counties were plotted. As the maps in *Appendix A* (pages 5 -9) demonstrate, in general the majority of businesses are either located near a major transportation corridor, or near significant population centers. It is interesting to note the locations of "high-tech" businesses, especially those located along I-79 in Allegheny and Butler Counties. (Refer to the map on page 7 of *Appendix A*) The businesses observed in this map are the industry sectors that are considered by the Ben Franklin Technology Partners to be high tech. With the location of these businesses along a major corridor, and the population growth seemingly moving from the Butler/Allegheny area northward, Mercer County is opportunely located in the path of progress.

- **Mercer County's population is declining and aging which has an impact on future business and employment opportunities.**

These demographic trends have resulted in a natural decrease in population whereby there have been more deaths than births. Combining the natural decrease with a net out migration of citizens - more people moving out of Mercer County than are moving into Mercer County - clearly demonstrates why there is a need to attract new industry to Mercer County. Detailed demographic information to support this trend is located in *Appendix A*.

- **Mercer County income levels and housing values are lower than the state and nation.**

This can be an advantage in attracting new businesses. It can also be a disadvantage when attempting to attract a workforce that is looking for specific amenities such as a modern housing stock. *Appendix A* contains detailed income and housing data.

- **The County's greatest economic strengths come from the Manufacturing and Health Services sectors.**

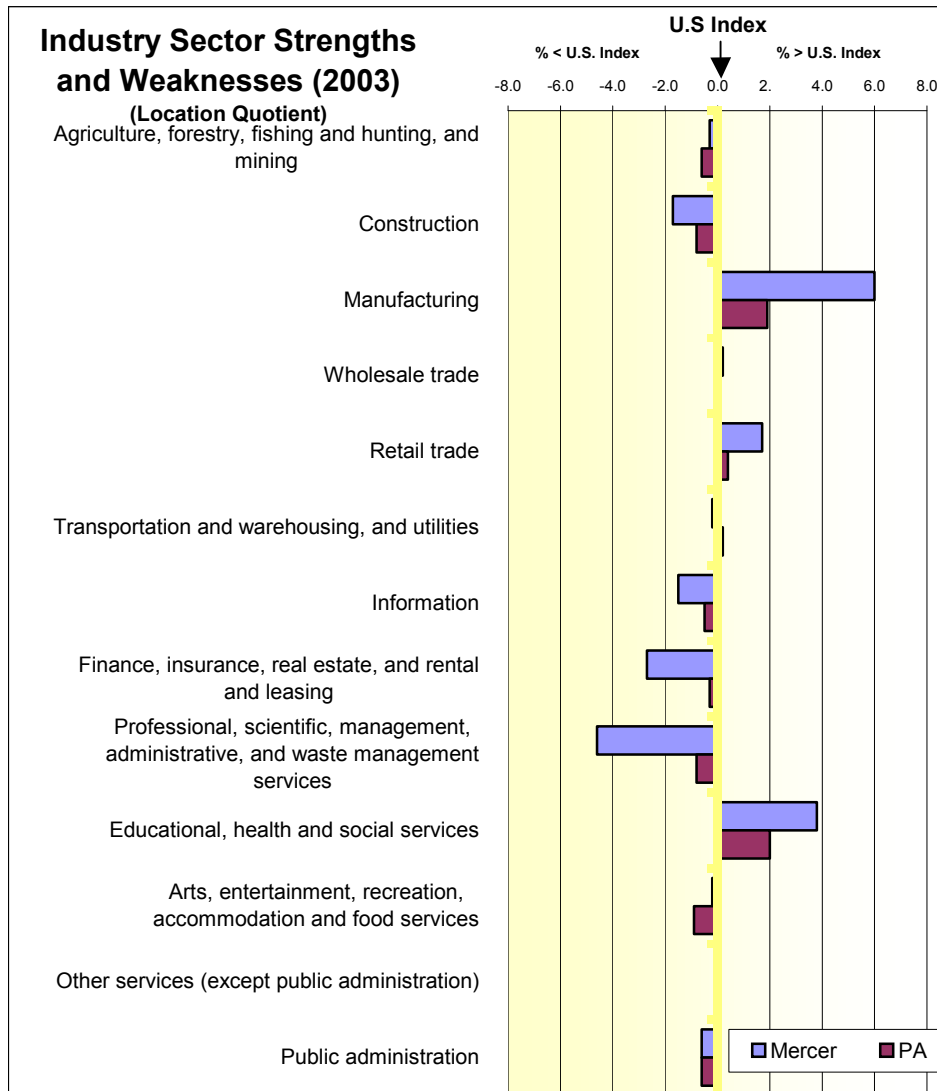
Over the past decade, Mercer County has seen an overall increase of approximately 14.5% in its workforce; however, some dramatic changes have taken place within individual industry sectors. The manufacturing and health and health services sectors are by far the strengths in Mercer County's economy making up 17.8% and 23.1% of the local economy, respectively.

From its peak in 1998 of approximately 11,900 employees, the manufacturing sector dipped in 2003 to its lowest point in the decade of 8,700 employees, a drop of almost 27%. The education and health services sector has seen a steady increase in employment over the past decade from approximately 8,000 employees in 1993, to a high of 11,300 in 2003. Over 71% of the employees in this sector provide ambulatory health care services, with only 2% providing education services. The retail sector is also strong in the County, likely due to the presence of the Prime Outlets in Grove City, which serve Mercer County, as well as the Pittsburgh, Youngstown and Erie areas. *Figure 1* demonstrates the concentration (or location quotient) of industry sectors in Mercer County and Pennsylvania as compared to the U.S.

While Pennsylvania ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation, behind California, Texas and Ohio in employees in the manufacturing sector, the concentration of manufacturing in Mercer County's economy is three times greater than that in Pennsylvania when compared to the national concentration. This demonstrates the County's level of dependence on the manufacturing industry, an industry that is in worldwide transition, and is projected by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry to lose another 700 employees in the County by 2010. In contrast, the education and health services sector is expected to *gain* another 1,600 employees by 2010.

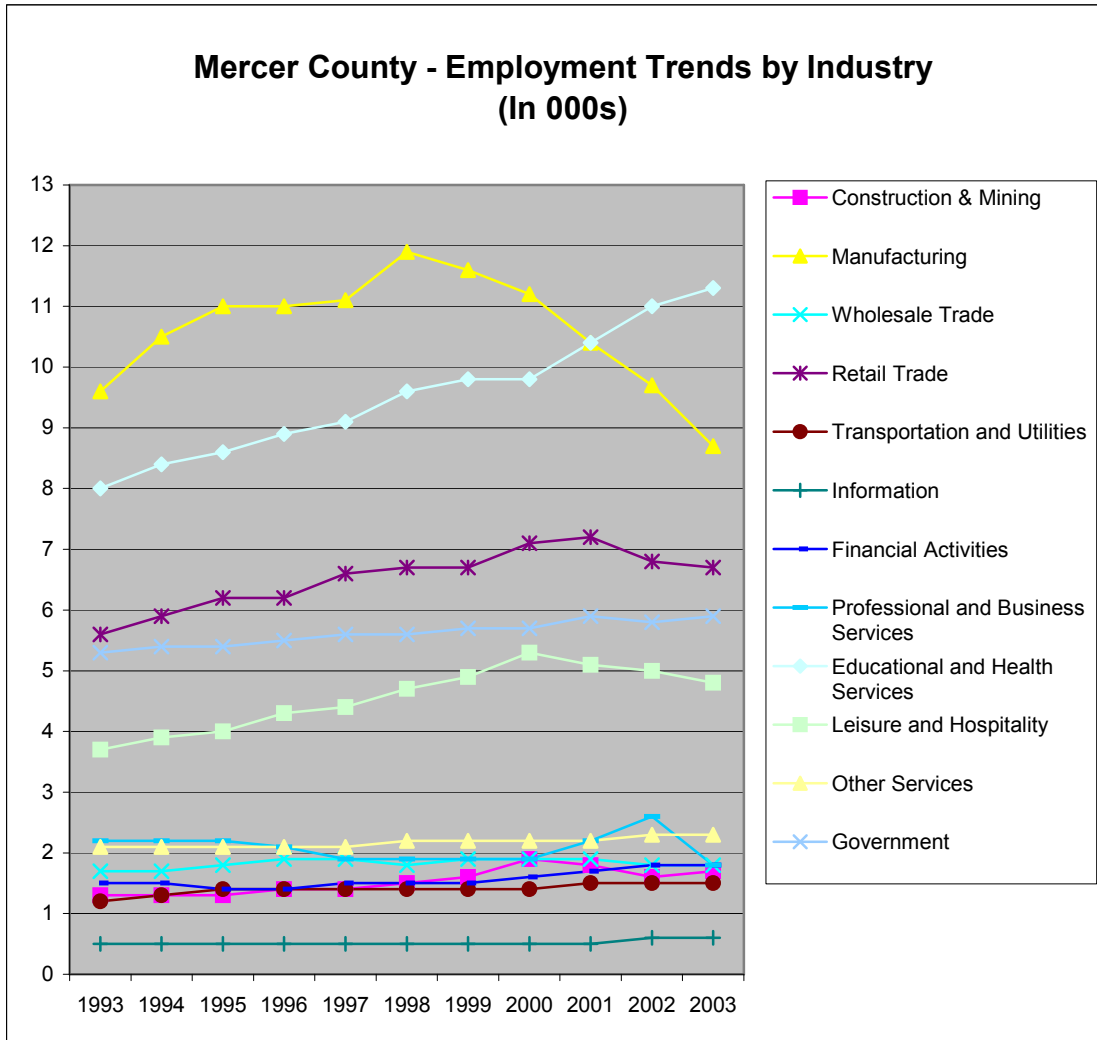
The overall workforce in Mercer County *decreased* by only 0.8% between 1998 and 2003, while the national workforce *increased* at a rate of 2.6%. Nationally, the manufacturing sector decreased by 16.3% during this time period as compared to 26.9% in Mercer County. *Figure 2* shows the trends in various industry sectors over the past ten years.

Figure 1



Source: U.S. Department of Labor & Industry, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 2



Source: U.S. Department of Labor & Industry, Bureau of Labor Statistics.



To further analyze Mercer County's economic structure and change, Delta performed a "shift-share" analysis to compare components of employment changes in Mercer County between 1998 and 2003 to national growth factors during that time period. A "shift-share" analysis consists of following three calculations:

- 1. National Growth Share** - The national growth share is the calculated change in Mercer County employment if all industry sectors grew at the same rate as the overall national change. Employment in the U.S. grew overall by 2.6%, compared to an overall decrease in Mercer County of 0.8%. If employment in all industry sectors in Mercer County had increased by 2.6%, Mercer County would have added 1,282 employees to its workforce instead of losing 400 - for a difference of 1,682 employees.
- 2. Industry Mix Share** - The second step in a shift-share analysis is to determine how much of the *difference in* actual employment change and national growth share can be attributed to the local industry mix, independent of national influence. This component of the analysis is calculated by comparing the national growth rate of *each industry* to the overall national growth rate. By applying the resulting rate difference to local employment, the change in employment due to the mix of industry can be estimated. Of the 1,632 difference in change as calculated above, it is estimated that approximately 706 jobs (or 42%) were lost due to the mix of industry in the County.
- 3. Local Share** - The third step in a shift-share analysis is to determine whether or not local industries are growing faster or slower in Mercer County than in the U.S. as a whole. The relative growth or decline of a local industry compared to the U.S. can indicate the degree of competitiveness of the industry in Mercer County. Of the 1,632 difference in change as calculated above, it is estimated that approximately 976 jobs (or 58%) were lost due to local share, or a lack of local industry competitiveness. Based on this calculation, the education and health services, financial activities, and transportation and utilities industry sectors seem to have the greatest competitive edge in Mercer County.

Table 7 presents detailed shift-share calculations and Figure 3 graphically depicts the results of the shift share analysis.

**Table 7  
Mercer County Shift Share Analysis**

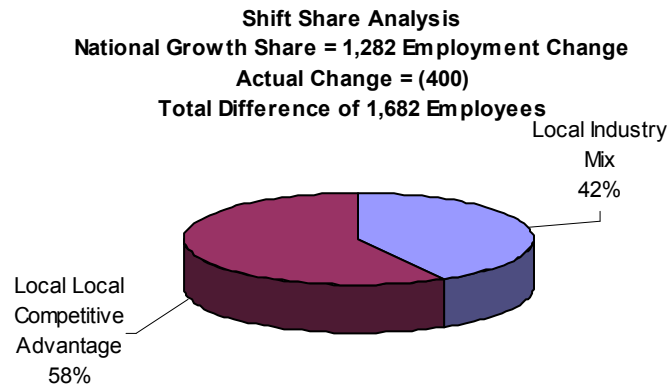
Mercer County Employment					% Change National	National Growth Share <sup>(1)</sup>	Industry Mix Share <sup>(2)</sup>	Local Share <sup>(3)</sup>
1998	2003	Job Change	% Change					
Construction & Mining	1,500	1,700	200	13.3%	8.4%	39	87	74
Manufacturing	11,900	8,700	-3,200	-26.9%	-16.3%	309	(2,247)	(1,263)
Wholesale Trade	1,800	1,800	0	0.0%	-3.9%	47	(117)	70
Retail Trade	6,700	6,700	0	0.0%	2.5%	174	(6)	(168)
Transportation and Utilities	1,400	1,500	100	7.1%	-18.9%	36	(301)	364
Information	500	600	100	20.0%	2.1%	13	(2)	89
Financial Activities	1,500	1,800	300	20.0%	6.7%	39	61	200
Professional and Business Services	1,900	1,800	-100	-5.3%	6.0%	49	66	(215)
Educational and Health Services	9,600	11,300	1,700	17.7%	14.4%	250	1,133	318
Leisure and Hospitality	4,700	4,800	100	2.1%	7.4%	122	225	(247)
Other Services	2,200	2,300	100	4.5%	6.9%	57	94	(52)
Government	5,600	5,900	300	5.4%	8.0%	146	302	(148)
<b>Total</b>	<b>49,300</b>	<b>48,900</b>	<b>-400</b>	<b>-0.8%</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>1,282</b>	<b>(706)</b>	<b>(976)</b>

Data Source: Source: U.S. Department of Labor & Industry, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Note: Totals may not foot accurately due to rounding.

- (1) Mercer County 1998 Employment x total % change national = National Growth Share
- (2) Mercer County 1998 Employment x (% national change by industry – total % national change) = Industry Mix Share
- (3) Mercer County 1998 Employment x (Mercer County % change - % change national) = Local Share

Figure 3



- **The majority of the County's workforce resides in Mercer County.**

Approximately 40,319, or 79 % of the Mercer County's workforce resides within the County, with the majority of the 10,801 who work outside the County traveling to Trumbull County, Ohio to work. *Appendix A* includes additional commuting pattern information.

- **Mercer County's workforce includes a higher percentage of manufacturing fields than the state and a lower percentage of management and professional fields than the state.**

Another key consideration in exploring market opportunities is the education level and occupations of Mercer County's workforce. Eighty-three percent of the Mercer County population 25 years and over has at least a high school diploma, which is a slightly higher percentage than the Pennsylvania average of 82%. However, 17% of Mercer County's residents have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 22% in Pennsylvania.

Twenty-one percent of Mercer County's workforce is employed in production, transportation & material moving occupations compared to 16.3% in Pennsylvania. Almost 28% of Mercer County's workforce is employed in management, professional & related occupations compared to almost 33% in the State as a whole.

Figures in *Appendix A* (page 4) provide detailed education attainment comparisons, as well as occupation comparisons in Mercer County and Pennsylvania.

### ***Market Assessment Conclusions***

The national market trends, economic and demographic trends, and results of the Business Retention and Expansion Program have been summarized to present the implications of this data on the local market. These are as follows:

- One of Mercer County's greatest market strengths is transportation infrastructure, with two major interstate highways intersecting in the central portion of the County.
- Mercer County is in the "path of progress" as land use and population patterns in the Pittsburgh Metro area move northward toward the southeast portion of the County. With its lower housing costs and transportation assets, Mercer County could position itself with the real estate assets and amenities that would be attractive to knowledge workers in high-tech industry sectors. Jobs created in these sectors would provide for a more diverse economy and likely bring higher wages to the area as well. Unlike the manufacturing sector, these industry sectors are expected to grow in the coming years.
- The national manufacturing trend is reflected in the local market with a 27% loss in manufacturing jobs over the last five years. The high concentration of the manufacturing sector in the County creates both risk and opportunity. With the sector undergoing significant changes worldwide, the County is vulnerable to further decreases in employment in the sector. However, this concentration also provides a tremendous opportunity to create partnerships in research and development that could make local companies leaders in innovation and in the development of "niche" markets.
- The strength in the Health Care sector in Mercer County presents opportunity for growth as well - both in creating new jobs, and in training unemployed or underemployed workers to fill positions in health related fields. This sector would also be an opportunity for creating partnerships in research and development and in developing "niche" markets.
- Approximately 20% of Mercer County residents work outside the County. Data is available to chart where these residents travel to work but it is not available to determine the occupations and education of these residents. If highly skilled technical or professional employees are traveling outside the County to find work, this could represent a lack of opportunity for employment within the County, and an opportunity to create new businesses locally that could employ these workers.

## **Future Market Opportunities**

### ***Objectives***

Building upon the market for the employing the ‘knowledge worker’ as identified in the Market Assessment, Delta focused on researching potential linkages between Mercer County and the sectors most likely to employ knowledge workers. Attracting knowledge workers will help to alleviate some of the key economic development issues that Mercer County faces such as recent plant closures, a stagnant population, and lack of sites for future economic development prospects. Attracting knowledge workers will attract a new industrial mix that will diversify the County’s economic base. Introducing new industries and the residents they employ will increase the number of county residents, reversing the trend of population loss and natural decrease, and increase the county’s tax base. Knowledge based industries and the workers they employ, seek housing and lifestyle opportunities that, through proper land use planning, may be accommodated by Mercer County and its municipalities.

To identify industry linkages that might translate to future jobs in Mercer County, Delta researched educational institutions and key regional economic initiatives and organizations. Preliminary research was conducted on select educational institutions in and close proximity to Mercer County.

The region of focus for this assessment included southwest Pennsylvania and the Youngstown, Ohio metropolitan statistical area that currently includes Mercer County. Although Mercer County is located in northwest Pennsylvania regions for the purpose of community and economic development initiatives, its economy is primarily impacted from southwest Pennsylvania and the Youngstown MSA.

Background data to support future market opportunities is located in *Appendix C*.

### ***Review of Academic Institutions***

Delta conducted a cursory review of colleges and universities located in and surrounding Mercer County. The purpose was to identify educational-business linkages. Knowing the type of degrees conferred upon students coupled with economic development initiatives and industry trends could lead to the development of industry specific economic development initiatives not currently promoted in Mercer County.

Delta’s review concentrated on science and engineering related degrees as these produce the greatest amount of knowledge workers. It was determined that these degrees would be the most consistent with existing and future technology industry clusters identified in the market assessment.

Elementary and secondary educational institutions were not included as part of Delta's research.

### **General Observations**

Based upon our review of the survey results, Delta offers general observations regarding academic institutions serving Mercer County.

**Colleges and universities serving Mercer County are graduating students with degrees in mechanical, electrical, mathematics and computer sciences.** These students provide a potential 'talent' resource for existing and future Mercer County employers. *Appendix C, Table 1* lists the number of graduates from researched schools in selected majors. Of the colleges researched, Grove City College confers the greatest number of science and engineering related degrees. Over 30 % of 2002 graduates received degrees in science and engineering related fields.

**Colleges and universities serving Mercer County are graduating many biology and life sciences majors.** Both Thiel College and Slippery Rock University maintain Cytotechnology programs. Cytotechnology, the research of assessing tissue samples for early detection of cancer and other pathological conditions, is a biotechnology field which currently has a high demand for qualified professionals.

**Youngstown State University is the regional leader in research and development.**

Youngstown State University has several research centers focused on different science and engineering disciplines including: the Center for Biomedical and Environmental Research, the Center for Photon Induced Processes, the Center for Biotechnology, and the Center for Engineering Research and Technology Transfer conducts research, develops applications for the new knowledge created, and applies state-of-the-art technologies to business and industry. Thiel College partners with Youngstown State University on engineering career options which results in a degree from Thiel and an engineering degree from Youngstown State.

### ***Regional Economic Initiatives and Organizations***

#### **Southwest Pennsylvania**

Two regional economic development initiatives are in place to stimulate growth in the information technology and biotechnology sectors in southwest Pennsylvania – the Pittsburgh Digital Greenhouse and the Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse. Two technology councils serve western Pennsylvania. The Pittsburgh Technology Council and the Technology Council of Northwest Pennsylvania are regional technology based organizations, which serve western Pennsylvania. As the Technology Council of Northwest Pennsylvania is a new organization established in 2001 economic linkages in Mercer County have not yet been established.

### **Pittsburgh Digital Greenhouse**

The Pittsburgh Digital Greenhouse (PDG) warrants discussion as a future market opportunity for several reasons.

- Colleges and universities in and surrounding Mercer County are graduating students that firms participating in the PDG are hiring.
- PDG member companies are not solely located in Pittsburgh, but are dispersed throughout western Pennsylvania especially north of Pittsburgh.
- The PDG is looking to expand its model of industry development to other locations within and outside of Pennsylvania.

### **Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse**

Similar to the PDG, the Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse (PLSG) is worth discussing in the context of future market opportunities. Local colleges and universities are graduating students with majors that are integral to companies that the PLSG seeks to serve. In addition, the PLSG model is a good example of private-public partnerships.

### **Eastern Ohio**

As indicated previously, Mercer County is located in the Youngstown, Ohio MSA. The level of economic development in neighboring Trumbull, Mahoning, and Columbiana Counties in Ohio is strikingly different than in Mercer County. Due to an excellent transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, the region markets itself through the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber as “Just in Time, USA”.

Like Mercer County several major transportation routes traverse the Youngstown-Warren area. Interstates 76 and 80 intersect near Austintown. I-680, which runs through Youngstown, links I-76 and I-80. The telecommunications infrastructure is just as developed. Broadband access and competition are not issues as they are in many communities. Every major network backbone provider has a Point-of-Presence (POP) within the region.

The region is home to several manufacturing and logistics firms. Recently announced economic development projects total nearly \$1.2 billion.<sup>9</sup> In 2002 General Motors announced a \$500 M investment at its Lordstown facility resulting in 6,890 new and retained jobs. Timken Latrobe, a specialty steel producer announced a \$22M project resulting in 130 new and retained jobs and Little Tikes I invested \$11M in its plastic toy products and distribution center resulting in 300 new and retained jobs. The area is home to several major distribution centers such as Kaufmann’s, Toys R Us, CO Steel, and Things Remembered. Delphi Packard Electric Systems recently invested \$25M to develop a high technology research and testing center in the region.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.regionalchamber.com/ed-newfacilities.html>.

The AEROPark project, dedicated in 2001, is a multi-modal business park combining aviation services and highway access into an excellent logistical environment. Business Facilities magazine presented AEROPark and the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber with the Gold Regional Economic Development Award in 2001. This award recognizes progressive national economic development efforts.

### ***Future Market Recommendations***

Delta proposes several potential recommendations to develop future market strategies and capitalize on the educational and economic development resources in the region. These recommendations are meant to generate future discussions with the goal of developing new partnerships between the educational and economic development organizations serving Mercer County.

- Quantify and qualify educational and industry linkages between higher educational institutions that serve Mercer County with the end goal of developing a research-commercialization project in Mercer County.
- Develop a partnership with the Pittsburgh Digital Greenhouse to replicate its model in Mercer County. This capitalizes on the academic strengths of Grove City College, Slippery Rock University, and Penn State main campus and Behrend campus through the Shenango campus.
- Develop a relationship with the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber to discuss future economic development initiatives and projects that could benefit both Mercer County and the Youngstown region.



## **Target Industries**

### ***Methodology***

Both qualitative and quantitative information was used to arrive at a list of target industries for Mercer County. In addition to using the North American Industry Classification System (NACIS) to identify industries with a similar production orientation, trade and federal publications were consulted to identify broader market forces that could impact the local economy. By focusing on those wealth-generating industries that have the strongest potential for future growth, Mercer County can concentrate limited resources effectively and efficiently. The following process was used to identify industries that showed a strong competitive advantage.

- Current industry employment data was used to determine which industries exhibited local specialization and export-orientation. Location quotient and shift-share analysis were quantitative measures used to identify the County's basic industries – those industries that export goods and services (refer to the Market Assessment section of this report).
- Industries identified as basic to the County economy were further examined to identify clusters with favorable employment and wage patterns.
- Those industries that exhibited negative employment growth and/or fell below the average Statewide wage for all industries would typically be eliminated from consideration as a target industry; however, in the case of Mercer County, surrounding regional trends, particularly in warehousing and technology and professional services, precipitated an additional look at several of these industries.

Delta also considered a key factor identified by MCRPC at the beginning of the project, the need to reverse the trends of natural population decrease and an out migration of citizens. Therefore, the quantitative analysis included consideration of industries that are wealth generating.

To develop an effective economic development program, the County should concentrate its resources on industries that are need the greatest amount of technical and financial assistance. For this reason, industries that have flourished regardless of the County's influence should be considered as target industries but should not be marketed as heavily as industries that promise diversified economic opportunities. For example, manufacturing is a primary example of an industry that is basic to the County's economy and prospers, relatively speaking, in the absence of any targeted outreach or marketing campaign.

The target industries identified through quantitative and qualitative analysis are identified below.

## ***Education and Health Services (NAICS 61 & 62)***

### **Key Components of the Cluster**

The Education and Health Services cluster is comprised of two parts: the educational services sector (61) and the health care and social assistance sector (62). The educational services sector includes establishments that provide instruction and training delivered by specialized establishments such as school, college, universities, and training centers. The health care and social assistance sector comprises establishments providing health care and social assistance for individuals.

### **Industry Size and Growth**

The Education and Health Services sector has seen a steady increase in employment over the past decade from approximately 8,000 employees in 1993, to a high of 11,300 in 2003. Of the 11,300 people employed in the sector in Mercer County, over 71 % of the employees in this sector provide ambulatory health care services. Therefore, the sector focus should be directed towards healthcare.

The level of employment in the Education and Health Services sector has surpassed Manufacturing as the County's largest employment sector. Employment in the Manufacturing sector dropped from 11,900 in 1998 to 8,700 in 1993.

### **Current Trends and Future Prospects**

The strength in the health services sector in Mercer County presents opportunity for growth in creating new jobs and in training unemployed or underemployed workers to fill positions in health related fields. This sector would also be an opportunity for creating partnerships in research and development and in developing "niche" markets.

## ***Professional and Business Services (NAICS 54 – 56)***

### **Key Components of the Cluster**

The Professional and Businesses Services sector is made up of three parts: the professional, scientific, and technical services sector (54), the management of companies and enterprises sector (55), and the administrative and support and waste management and remediation services sector (56).

The professional, scientific, and technical services sector comprises establishments that specialize in performing professional, scientific, and technical activities including: legal advice and representation; accounting, bookkeeping, and payroll services; architectural, engineering, and specialized design services; computer services; consulting services; research services;

advertising services; photographic services; translation and interpretation services; veterinary services; and other professional, scientific, and technical services.

The management of companies and enterprises sector comprises (1) establishments that hold the securities of (or other equity interests in) companies and enterprises for the purpose of owning a controlling interest or influencing management decisions or (2) establishments (except government establishments) that administer, oversee, and manage establishments of the company or enterprise and that normally undertake the strategic or organizational planning and decision making role of the company or enterprise.

The administrative and support and waste management and remediation services sector comprises establishments performing routine support activities for the day-to-day operations of other organizations. Activities performed include: office administration, hiring and placing of personnel, document preparation and similar clerical services, solicitation, collection, security and surveillance services, cleaning, and waste disposal services.

### **Industry Size and Growth**

The number of workers employed in Professional and Business Services in 2003 was 1,800, a 5.3 % decrease from employment in the sector in 1998. The percent of occupations in management and professional related fields was lower in Mercer County (27.6%) than in the state (32.6%).

### **Current Trends and Future Prospects**

Based on quantitative data alone, the identification of Professional and Business Services would seem odd considering that the location quotient for the industry sector was the weakest for Mercer County (refer to *Figure 1* on page 21). However, several market and future market opportunity trends suggest that this sector is an appropriate target.

Mercer County is in the “path of progress” as land use and population patterns in the Pittsburgh Metro area move northward toward the southeast portion of the County. Key County assets including lower housing costs and transportation assets, combined with the real estate assets and amenities that could result in a planned business community developed by Mercer County would be attractive to knowledge workers in professional and research jobs. Jobs created in these sectors would provide for a more diverse economy and likely bring higher wages to the area as well. Unlike the manufacturing sector, these industry sectors are expected to grow in the coming years.

Another consideration is that approximately 20 % of Mercer County residents work outside the County. Although data is not available to determine the occupations and education of these residents, if highly skilled technical or professional employees are traveling outside the County to find work, this could represent a lack of opportunity for employment within the County, and an opportunity to create new businesses locally that could employ these workers.

Additionally, the presence of higher educational facilities in Mercer County provides an opportunity to quantify and qualify educational and industry linkages between higher educational institutions that serve Mercer County. The objective would be the development of a research-commercialization partnership in Mercer County with the end goal of creating new businesses. Similarly, developing a partnership with the Pittsburgh Digital Greenhouse to replicate its education-job creation model in Mercer County would result, over time, in the creation of new businesses. This capitalizes on the academic strengths of Grove City College, Slippery Rock University, and Penn State main campus and Behrend campus through the Shenango campus.

### ***Information (NAICS 51)***

#### **Key Components of the Cluster**

The Information sector includes businesses completing the following types of tasks: (a) producing and distributing information and cultural products, (b) providing the means to transmit or distribute these products as well as data or communications, and (c) processing data.

The main components of this sector are the publishing industries, including software publishing, and both traditional publishing and publishing exclusively on the Internet; the motion picture and sound recording industries; the broadcasting industries, including traditional broadcasting and those broadcasting exclusively over the Internet; the telecommunications industries; the industries known as Internet service providers and web search portals, data processing industries, and the information services industries.

#### **Industry Size and Growth**

While the Information sector is growing in Mercer County, a 7 % increase in employment between 1998 and 2003, it employs the lowest number of workers of all of the sectors, 600 employs.

#### **Current Trends and Future Prospects**

Similar to the Professional and Business Services sector, identifying Information as a target industry is puzzling at first glance considering the industry size in Mercer County. However, the same factors that were used to select the Professional and Business Services sector are applicable to the Information sector: path of progress, commuting patterns, and potential educational linkages.

## ***Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities (NAICS 48-49 & 22)***

### **Key Components of the Cluster**

The transportation and warehousing sector includes industries providing transportation of passengers and cargo, warehousing and storage for goods, scenic and sightseeing transportation, and support activities related to modes of transportation. Businesses in these industries use transportation equipment or transportation related facilities as a productive asset. The type of equipment depends on the mode of transportation. The modes of transportation are air, rail, water, road, and pipeline.

The utilities sector includes businesses that provide the following utility services: electric power, natural gas, steam supply, water supply, and sewage removal. Within this sector, the specific activities associated with the utility services provided vary by utility: electric power includes generation, transmission, and distribution; natural gas includes distribution; steam supply includes provision and/or distribution; water supply includes treatment and distribution; and sewage removal includes collection, treatment, and disposal of waste through sewer systems and sewage treatment facilities.

### **Industry Size and Growth**

Employment in this sector increased 7.1 % between 1998 and 2003. Its sector strength is flat compared to other industries in the County (refer to *Figure 1* on page 23).

### **Current Trends and Future Prospects**

The sector was selected as a target industry due to regional trends outside of Pennsylvania. The map located on page 6 of *Appendix A* documents the location of a strong distribution corridor in eastern Ohio. The intersection of I-80 and I-76 in Trumbull County as well as I-680, which also links I-80 and I-76, provides a strong transportation network. This network has led to the development of a major distribution hub. Firms such as Kaufmann's, Toys R Us, and CO Steel have located distribution and logistics facilities in the region. In fact, the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber markets the area as 'Just In Time, USA'.<sup>10</sup> This branding refers not only to the area's excellent transportation infrastructure but also to its telecommunications infrastructure. Major telecommunications providers such as WORLDCOM and AT&T have a Point-of-Presence (POP) located in the area.

Preparing a supply of readily available land for warehousing uses would enable Mercer County to potentially attract eastern Ohio warehouse/distribution projects.

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<sup>10</sup> Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber, [www.regionalchamber.com](http://www.regionalchamber.com)

## ***Manufacturing (NAICS 31-33)***

### **Key Components of the Cluster**

The manufacturing sector consists of establishments engaged in the mechanical, physical, or chemical transformation of materials, substances, or components into new products.

### **Industry Size and Growth**

The Manufacturing sector makes up 17.8% of the local economy. From its peak in 1998 of approximately 11,900 employees, the manufacturing sector dipped in 2003 to its lowest point in the decade of 8,700 employees, a drop of almost 27%. Nationally, the manufacturing sector decreased by 16.3% during this time period as compared to 26.9% in Mercer County.

### **Current Trends and Future Prospects**

The national manufacturing trend is reflected in the local market with a 27% loss in manufacturing jobs over the last five years. The high concentration of the manufacturing sector in the County creates both risk and opportunity. With the sector undergoing significant changes worldwide, the County is vulnerable to further decreases in employment in the sector. However, this concentration also provides a tremendous opportunity to create partnerships in research and development that could make local companies leaders in innovation and in the development of “niche” markets.

### ***Suggested Land Uses for Encouraging Target Industry Growth***

Critical to developing a cluster of target industries is to find location(s) to mass several businesses. This creates a driving force to develop the industry segment, as many people doing the same types of work are located in the same location. To further promote the development of industry clusters, Delta suggests that land use patterns for targeted sites be carefully planned with the needs of the target industries incorporated into the site design.

The following suggested land uses have been developed for the target industry sectors identified in this analysis. These land use suggestions are meant to encourage future discussion on how land should be developed in order to achieve the maximum benefit of a focused marketing strategy and leverage limited resources.

### **Industrial Park**

Manufacturing and Warehousing/Logistics users, which accounted for 76 % of Mercer County’s recent prospects, require large parcels located in a traditional industrial park.

This type of development has been quite successful in Mercer County. The industrial park market has been recently active in neighboring Trumbull and Mahoning Counties.

### **Planned Business Community**

To maximize the benefits of locating many professional businesses, potentially of varying industry sectors, Delta suggests that Mercer County consider a planned development/community including a mix of business/office, service retail, and associated amenities. Once businesses are established in the park it is anticipated that residential development would be constructed adjacent to the park resulting over time in a planned community.

This type of planned development supports a national trend towards smaller businesses seeking developed office space and is consistent with the several of the target industries proposed for Mercer County (Information, Education and health services, and Professional and business services). This type of development also reflects the regional trend of business and office development moving northward from the Pittsburgh metropolitan area. Nineteen percent of Mercer County's current prospects would require this type of development.

A development of this type would not only serve to attract new jobs it would attract new residents. This will help Mercer County to 'import' new citizens reversing the trends of population decline and a natural population decrease.

## Priority Site Selection

### *Methodology*

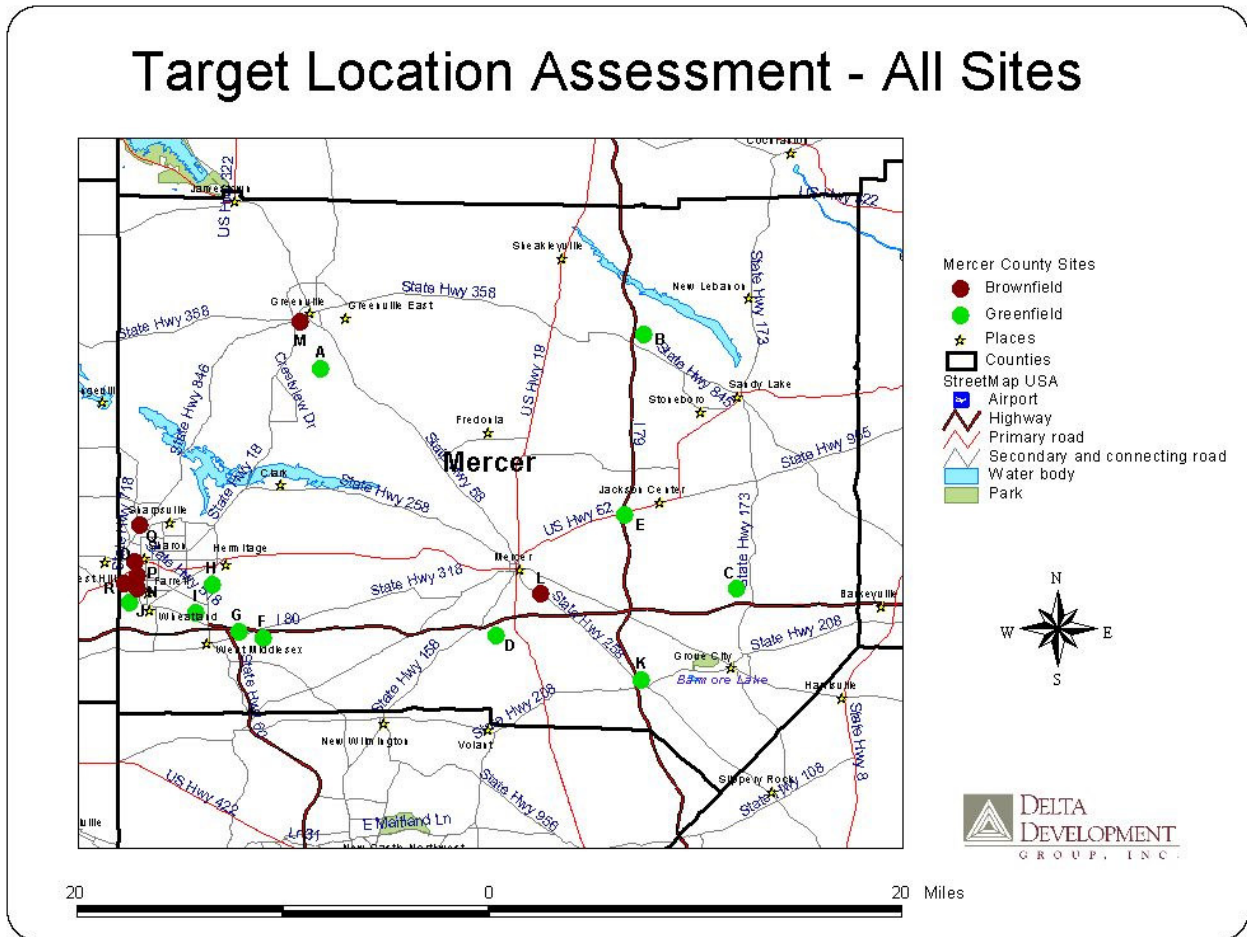
The methodology used for selecting priority sites included the following steps:

- Establishing market based site selection factors. Completing this task required review of relevant data sources in order to qualitatively determine appropriate market based site selection criteria for Mercer County. Analyzing relevant data sources included review of the following:
  - Recent Mercer County prospect requirements identified in Penn-Northwest's prospect database
  - National corporate site selection factors identified
  - Input supplied by regional real estate brokers through a survey administered by Penn-Northwest
  - Target industry site requirements identified through market and future market opportunity data
- After site selection factors were selected, each factor was weighted relative to its importance with 5 being the most important and 1 being the least important.
- Each Strategy 1000 site (refer to *Map 1*) was assigned a score for each factor with 5 being the highest score and 1 the lowest score.
- Tabulating overall scores resulted in identifying the top three priority sites from the list of Strategy 1000 sites.



Map 1

## Target Location Assessment - All Sites



## ***Establishing Market Based Site Selection Criteria***

### **Review of Site Selection Factor Data Sources**

#### **Mercer County Prospect Requirements**

Penn-Northwest's prospect database (July 2002 – December 2003) identifies the following as the most prominent prospect requirements (i.e. site selection factors):

- Proximity to major interstates
- Availability of skilled labor force
- Working capital
- Availability of sufficiently sized land
- Ample infrastructure

These requirements are consistent with national site selection factors

#### **Corporate Site Selection Data**

*Area Development's* 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> annual corporate surveys document the top corporate site selection factors from industry sectors across the country (*Table 8*). Availability of skilled labor and labor costs were consistently ranked as top site selection factors. In fact skilled labor, labor costs, and highway accessibility were consistently ranked in the top five site selection factors.

Table 8

**Area Development Annual Corporate Survey  
Top Site Selection Factors  
(2001, 2002, 2003)**

Ranking	2001 Factors	2002 Factors	2003 Factors
1	Availability of skilled labor	Availability of skilled labor	State and local incentives
2	Labor costs	Labor costs	Labor costs
3	Highway accessibility	Tax exemptions	Availability of skilled labor
4	Energy availability and costs	State and local incentives	Highway accessibility
5	Availability of telecommunications services	Highway accessibility	Occupancy or Construction Costs
6	Tax exemptions	Corporate tax rate	Tax exemptions
7	Occupancy or construction costs	Proximity to major markets	Corporate tax rate
8	State and local incentives	Occupancy or construction costs	Energy availability and costs
9	Proximity to major markets	Energy availability and costs	Proximity to major markets
10	Availability of land	Environmental regulations	Availability of land

Source: *Area Development*. 2001 Corporate Survey, 2002 Corporate Survey and 2003 Corporate Survey.

Three quarters of the individuals who responded to the corporate surveys in 2001, 2002 and 2003 were from the Manufacturing sector, which represents the largest component of *Area Development's* readership. Therefore, these surveys are highly relevant in identifying site selection factors as Penn-Northwest's prospects are predominantly manufacturing based (68.1%).

### **Real Estate Brokers Input**

Information from regional real estate brokers was used to validate the site selection factors identified by Delta to the maximum extent possible. To engage the regional broker community, Penn-Northwest sent correspondence including a survey to 12 real estate brokers. A copy of the survey is located in *Appendix D*.

The following comments are based on the limited survey responses:

- Brokers in the region are serving predominantly commercial clients.
- Professional service firms are the current types of businesses seeking locations.
- It is anticipated that additional distribution, service, and research and development firms will be seeking locations within the region in the future.

The key factors that drive site location decisions are:

- Location (specifically access to interstates)
- Economic incentives
- Infrastructure

The following Strategy 1000 sites are viewed as the most desirable from a brokerage perspective:

- Exit 113, I-79 Reason: Best access to I-79 and Pittsburgh (< 1 hour)
- Exit 121, I-79 Reason: Good access to Mercer, I-80, I-79 and Erie area
- Exit 15, I-80 Reason: Access to I-80, Mercer and I-79

The site selection factors identified by the regional real estate brokers are consistent with factors required by recent Mercer County prospects and national corporate site selection factors.

It is interesting to note that the regional real estate brokers are receiving the highest level of inquiry from service firms and professional firms requiring office rather than industrial land. This is likely due to the fact that several of the regional real estate brokers cover the Pittsburgh market, which receives a larger percentage of office space based inquiries. This trend supports focusing some of Mercer County's marketing efforts on attracting target industries that utilize office space.

The broker projection that warehouse and distribution sectors will provide a greater level of inquiry supports attracting the Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities sector.

### **Target Industry Site Requirements**

The following target industries have been identified:

- Education and Health Services

- Professional and Business Services
- Information
- Transportation and Warehousing and Utilities
- Manufacturing

As discussed in the target industry section of this report, industry sectors require differing space requirements that are obviously dictated by the actual use of buildings. The Manufacturing and Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities sectors require larger parcels of *industrial* land while Education and Healthcare, Information, and Professional and Business Services sectors tend to require the availability of sufficiently sized office space as opposed to land. For office uses, satisfying the needs of knowledge workers and the businesses that employ these workers is critical. Therefore, factors that meet the needs of knowledge workers are necessary to begin to attract the industry sectors that employ these workers to Mercer County.

### **Mercer County Site Selection Factors**

As discussed earlier in this section, site selection factors were developed based on Mercer County prospect requirements, corporate site selection factors, regional real estate broker input, and target industries. To ensure that all criteria were market driven, Delta assumed that each Strategy 1000 site had all required approvals and infrastructure.

Delta selected the following site selection factors for this study. Several factors are consistent with national corporate site selection factors; however, a few were selected for their particular relevance in attracting target industries to Mercer County.

#### **Proximity to a Major Transportation Corridor**

Location near a major transportation corridor is necessary to efficiently transport workers and goods. This is evident from the established development patterns in the region. Recent Mercer county prospects indicated that locations close to the County's Interstates and particularly near Interstate interchanges were high priority. Additionally, businesses employing the target industries require locations at or near major highways.

The Map located on page 7 *Appendix A* shows a strong correlation between high tech businesses in the region and transportation corridors. Businesses, in industries beyond Information, are moving out from the Pittsburgh metropolitan area and locating around the major transportation corridors. The same pattern can be seen in Trumbull and Mahoning Counties in Ohio, although the extent of businesses migrating from the core urban area of Youngstown is not as pronounced.

### **Sufficiently Sized Land**

The availability of larger parcels was frequently requested by Mercer County prospects. Two of the target industries, Manufacturing and Transportation and Warehousing routinely require large sized, contiguous parcels. Each site was ranked for acreage as follows:

- 100+ acres                    5
- 75 - 99 acres                4
- 50 - 74 acres                3
- 25 - 49 acres                2
- < 25 acres                    1

### **Proximity to ‘Path of Progress’**

The ‘Path of Progress’ is somewhat similar to proximity to major markets that ranked in the top ten site selection factors identified by *Area Development*. ‘Path of Progress’ is differentiated in that it is describing the movement – or a shift or expansion - of the major market. In this case, development has been moving out from Allegheny County and is pushing northward towards Mercer County.

Also, recent developments in adjacent Trumbull and Mahoning Counties in Ohio would suggest that Mercer County could potentially be a logical untapped eastward location for new economic development. The maps located on pages 5 and 7 of *Appendix A* demonstrate the concentration of businesses in the Youngstown area. Recently announced economic development projects total nearly \$1.2 billion in investment.<sup>11</sup> Mercer County sites provide an opportunity to expand the ‘Path of Progress’ across the Ohio border.

### **Location at or South of I-80**

This factor was selected based on anecdotal information provided by real estate brokers that serve Mercer County. According to several real estate brokers, locations above I-80 are not viewed as positively as locations south of I-80. Penn-Northwest frequently hears this comment from prospects and brokers.

### **Proximity to a Qualified Workforce**

Workforce is critical to serve the needs of businesses. The availability of a qualified workforce in proximity to business locations is essential for future development in Mercer County.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.regionalchamber.com/ed-newfacilities.html>

### Proximity to Service Amenities

Several of the target industries identified – such as Information, Education and Health Services, and Professional and Business Services rely on the location of amenities to serve the needs of the workforce. These knowledge workers as described earlier in this report require the location of amenities – in close proximity – to serve daily needs such as service retail and restaurants.

### Priority Site Scoring & Identification

Each criterion was weighted for importance with 5 being the *most important* and 1 the *least important*. Delta weighted the factors as follows:

- Proximity to Major Transportation Corridor 5
- Sufficiently Sized Land 5
- Proximity to “Path of Progress” 4
- Location at I-80 or South 4
- Availability of Workforce 3
- Proximity to Service Amenities 3

Each Strategy 1000 site was given a score for each factor with 5 indicating strong correlation between the site and the factor and 1 indicating a weak correlation between the site and the factor. *Appendix E* identifies the weighting assigned to each factor and the score assigned to each site.

To derive the site rankings, the score for each site was multiplied by the weight for each criterion to derive the total site score.

*Table 9* shows the results of the scoring and ranking process. The tables consolidate a few of the Strategy 1000 sites, as several sites were located in close proximity.

**Table 9**  
**Target Location Assessment**  
**Priority Site Scores and Ranking**

Ranking			Proximity to major transportation corridor	Sufficiently sized land	Proximity to "path of progress"	Location at or south of I-80	Proximity to workforce	Proximity to service amenities	Total Score
1	D/L	Exit 15, I-80 - Lackawannock SW quad	25	25	16	20	12	15	113
2	K	Exit 113, I-79 - Springfield NE quad	25	25	16	20	12	15	113
3	G/F	Exit 4, I-80 - Shenango	25	25	8	20	15	15	108
4	C	Exit 24, I-80 - Wolf Creek	25	25	16	16	6	6	94
5	H	Hermitage Tech Park - Chadderton Airport	15	25	12	12	12	15	91
6	I	Hermitage Industrial Park - Broadway Ave.	15	20	12	12	12	15	86
7	J	Farrell Site in Hermitage	15	20	12	12	12	15	86
8	E	Exit 121, I-79 - Jackson Twp.	20	25	16	12	9	3	85
9	N	Caparo / SVIDC - Broadway (Farrell	15	10	12	12	12	15	76
10	Q	Westinghouse - Sharpsville Avenue	15	10	12	12	12	15	76
11	O	National Castings - just above Caparo Steel	15	5	12	12	12	15	71
12	P	Northwest Gardens - (Roemer/Idaho...)	15	5	12	12	12	15	71
13	R	Caparo (excess property/bldgs.) - Farrell	15	5	12	12	12	15	71
14	A	Reynolds East - Phase III	5	25	4	4	12	12	62
15	B	Exit 130, I-79 - New Vernon	20	25	4	4	3	3	59
16	M	B & LE - Hempfield Township (Greenville)	5	20	4	4	12	9	54

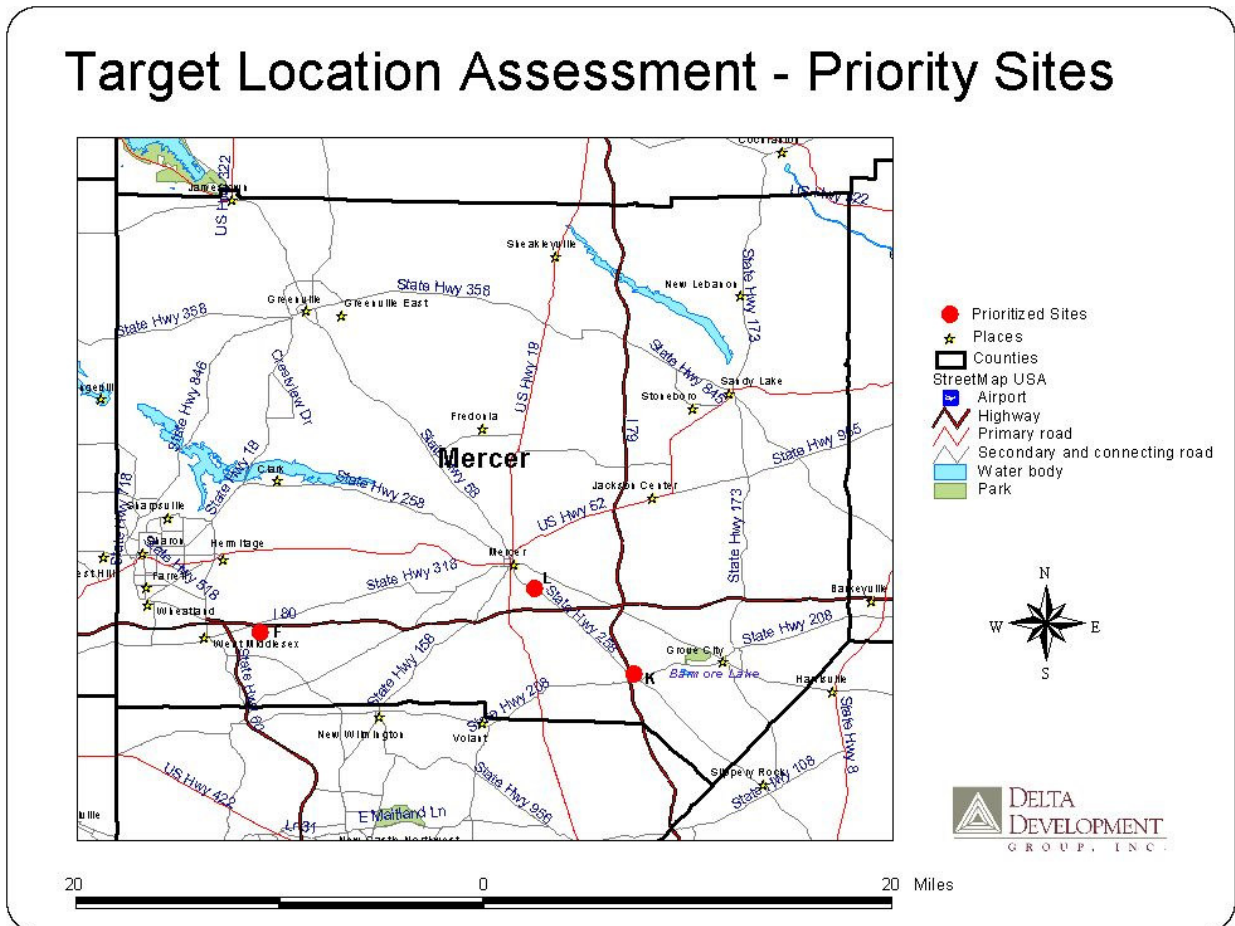


As identified in *Table 9* and *Map 2*, the top three scoring sites were:

1. Exit 15 - I-80
2. Exit 113 - I-79/PA 208
3. Exit 4 - I-80/PA60/PA318

As noted previously, these sites were selected solely on market conditions. The assumption has been made that all local, state, and federal permits and approvals - including environmental and transportation - have been obtained.

Map 2



## **Development Feasibility**

MCRPC and Penn-Northwest requested that Delta analyze the development feasibility for two of the three priority sites. The sites included Exit 15 – I-80 and Exit 4 – I-80/PA 60/PA 318. The purpose of the Development Feasibility is to create a framework to anticipate future financial results for the project(s). The Development Feasibility pulls from the previous sections of this document along with conceptual site designs, infrastructure construction cost estimates, and financial assumptions to produce a financial model for the project. The model incorporates detailed information on the various components to establish a return on equity using the cash flow created from market data for the cost of land sales and the amount of land sold on an annual basis.

### ***Methodology***

For the purpose of this study, Development Feasibility included the following steps:

- Conceptual Land Uses - In order to identify specific infrastructure costs associated with two of the priority sites, Delta proposed uses – from a market perspective - that would be most appropriate for each. The proposed uses are based on the identification of target industries and Delta’s professional judgment.
- Conceptual Site Layout - Based on potential land uses and site identification, conceptual site layouts were developed.
- Project Development Budget - The first step in developing the financial feasibility model was to establish a development budget that takes into consideration all known costs relating to the development of each project. This included land acquisition, site development, building construction and all related fees.
- Financial Assumptions - Utilizing the budget, it was necessary to develop a realistic plan for obtaining financing and factor those costs into the financial model. This included any interest rates and loan terms, as well as equity and the required rate of return.
- Cash Flow - Understanding each project’s cash flow is essential to crafting a comprehensive funding strategy, as well as the timing necessary draw downs. Using the project development budget and all financial assumptions, Delta developed a projected cash flow to support the project’s timeline.
- Sales Price - Following the establishment of a cash flow scenario, Delta determined the targeted sales price per parcel by dividing the number of square feet (or units) into the project’s cash flow.

- Public Funding - As the cash flow and sales price are finalized, the County should work with the project stakeholders to develop a public funding strategy utilizing funding sources from local, state and federal levels of government.
- Competitive Analysis - The competitive analysis identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the proposed site.
- Market Potential - The market potential presents conclusions about present base forecasts of rental rates, market share, gross revenue, vacancy, and absorption rates.

## ***Development Feasibility Results***

### **Exit 15 – I-80**

#### **Conceptual Land Uses**

The land parcels comprising this site total approximately 910 acres. To maximize the benefits of this large land area, Delta suggests that it be developed as a planned development/community including a mix of business/office, service retail, and associated amenities. Once the business park is established it is anticipated that planned residential development would be constructed adjacent to the site with the entire planned project extending from I-80 to Mercer.

A revitalized downtown Mercer would serve as a northern 'anchor' to the development. Acreage along I-80 and Route 19 would serve as Penn-Northwest's initial development project. Subsequent phases should be specified through a master plan developed to reflect this concept.

In order to develop necessary infrastructure for this site five municipalities have voted to establish the Neshannock Creek Watershed Joint Municipal Sewer Authority. Establishing a multi-municipal cooperation between five municipalities for the purpose of anticipating planned growth and development, leverages economic resources and promotes soundly planned development. The municipalities include: Coolspring, East Lackawannock, Findley, and Springfield Townships and the borough of Mercer.

An additional advantage of this location is that some of the acreage might be considered Brownfield redevelopment; therefore, it promotes reuse and soundly planned development.

This project would require significant coordination among local, county, and state officials. Penn-Northwest Development Corporation would need to identify and work with an interested residential and commercial real estate developer(s) for the planned community to achieve its full potential.

#### **Conceptual Site Layout**

Based upon discussions with MCRPC, Penn-Northwest, and Delta, Gannett Fleming, Inc. prepared a conceptual site layout. A copy is located in *Appendix F*.



**Weaknesses**

- Economic Development Incentives - Ohio's aggressive incentive programs are attractive to businesses. However, it is anticipated that this site will receive similar incentives.

**Opportunities**

- Regional Partnerships - Making the site available for future prospects strengthens the available land resources of Northwest Pennsylvania.
- Regional Planning and Economic Development - The site represents an opportunity to plan for Mercer County's future economic growth.
- Public Relations - Developing the site will provide new perspective and focus to local economic development efforts.
- Funding and Finance - Programs administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development may be available to provide financing for the site.

**Threats**

- Economy - Regional and global economies impact Mercer County's share of the market.
- Potential Toll Road - Recent Pennsylvania proposals to convert I-80 to a toll road could result in higher transportation costs at the site.

**Market Potential**

A regional industrial land absorption study was conducted for the Northwest Commission. The study notes that 383 industrial acres, including 21 Brownfield acres, were sold in Mercer County between 1990 and 1999.<sup>12</sup> Of that total, 295 acres were sold to local companies while 88 acres were absorbed by relocations into the County. Seventy seven percent of the land absorbed in the 1990's was due to local expansion. It is important to note that the County was unable to compete for potential locations that required immediate access to Interstate corridors.

Delta projects that 45 acres of sales per year is achievable based on the following assumptions:

- The County will capture one-third of the absorption of the 1990s equating to 12.5 acres (38 acres x 33%) plus.

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<sup>12</sup> S. Patz and Associates, Inc., Industrial Land Absorption Study Keystone Opportunity Zones Northwest Pennsylvania. March 2002. pp. 31, table 4.



- Project Financing
  - Equity \$0
  - Debt 100%
- Projected Annual Absorption 45 Acres
- Market Sales per Acre \$20,000
- Annual Revenue \$900,000
- Cash Flow \$53,134

### **Competitive Analysis**

The proposed site is located immediately adjacent to I-80 off Exit 4 and includes approximately 815 acres. The proposed business park would have direct access to I-80 from a new exit and serve the industrial market. The following discussion presents information to assess the site's relative competitive liabilities and assets.

#### **Strengths**

- Location - The property is located between the Pittsburgh and Youngstown metropolitan areas and could provide sites for manufacturing and warehousing/logistics firms.
- Infrastructure – Ample infrastructure is available to serve the potential park tenants.
- Sales – Mercer County has an experienced and aggressive local economic development team.
- Size - The property includes approximately 1,050 acres of contiguous land adjacent to an Interstate highway. It meets the size and location requirements of several recent Mercer County prospects.

#### **Weaknesses**

- Economic Development Incentives – Ohio's aggressive incentive programs are attractive to businesses. However, it is anticipated that this site will receive similar incentives.
- Manufacturing - In an era when traditional manufacturing is decreasing, future opportunities should be diverse.

### ***Opportunities***

- Funding and Finance – Programs administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development may be available to provide financing for the site.
- Regional Implications – The project site provides an alternative site location for regional prospects.
- Regional Planning and Economic Development – The project coordinates planning and economic development efforts to bring planned growth to Mercer County.
- Public Relations – The project will bring a new perspective and focus to local economic development.

### ***Threats***

- Economy – Regional and global economies impact Mercer County's share of the market.
- Foreign Competition – The County's strong manufacturing dependence should be monitored relative to foreign competitors.
- Potential Toll Road – Recent Pennsylvania proposals to convert I-80 to a toll road could result in higher transportation costs at the site.

### **Market Potential**

A regional industrial land absorption study was conducted for the Northwest Commission. The study notes that 383 industrial acres, including 21 Brownfield acres, were sold in Mercer County between 1990 and 1999.<sup>14</sup> Of that total, 295 acres were sold to local companies while 88 acres were absorbed by relocations into the County. Seventy seven percent of the land absorbed in the 1990's was due to local expansion. It is important to note that the County was unable to compete for potential locations that required immediate access to Interstate corridors.

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<sup>14</sup> S. Patz and Associates, Inc., Industrial Land Absorption Study Keystone Opportunity Zones Northwest Pennsylvania. March 2002. pp. 31, table 4.



- The County will capture 5 % of its annual prospects with each prospect requiring an assumed 13 acres equating to (50 prospects x 5% x 13 acres).

***Comparative Sales Prices***

Sales prices for fully developed property ranges from \$15,000 to \$25,000 per acre Mercer County, \$25,000 to \$50,000 in the Youngstown area, and in the Pittsburgh suburbs most property zoned commercial sells for \$50,000 to \$125,000 per acre. The proposed land sales price of \$30,000 per acre is well within the market range.

Sources used to develop comparative sales prices include Penn-Northwest Development Corporation, Harshaws' Real Estate, Inc., and the Youngstown/ Warren Regional Chamber of Commerce.

## **Appendix A – Market Assessment Background Data**

INSERT - Market Assessment Background Data

## **Appendix B – Pennsylvania Business Retention and Expansion Program Overview**

INSERT - Pennsylvania Business Retention and Expansion Program Overview

## **Appendix C – Future Market Opportunities Background Data**

INSERT - Future Market Opportunities Background Data

## **Appendix D – Regional Real Estate Brokers Survey**

INSERT – Regional Real Estate Brokers Survey

## Appendix E – Site Selection Weighting, Ranking, and Scoring

INSERT – Site Selection Factors Weighting and Ranking

## Appendix F – Exit 15 Development Feasibility

INSERT - Exit 15 Development Feasibility

## **Appendix G – Exit 4 Development Feasibility**

INSERT - Exit 4 Development Feasibility