

Delaware must be “Ready In 6” to realize its economic potential

BY ROBERT PERKINS

AS BUSINESSES SEEK TO START, expand or relocate operations in Delaware, they increasingly are finding a very large – and very unnecessary – roadblock in their way.

The state’s permitting and regulatory process can stretch up to 24 months, placing the state at a distinct economic development disadvantage when it comes to attracting and growing business – especially considering the approval timelines in Maryland and Pennsylvania average closer to six months.

These findings were included in an independent analysis conducted last year by professional services firm KPMG, which concludes that Delaware is missing out on economic development opportunities and has an opportunity to be more competitive if its permitting processes were strengthened through streamlined communication between state agencies, greater transparency and cost predictability, and a fast-track approval program for high-priority projects, among other recommendations.

The analysis finds, “With significant competition between states for jobs, talent and investment, an efficient permit process is critical to demonstrate a favorable business climate and provide a predictable outcome for businesses seeking to locate or expand in Delaware. Because prospective businesses target locations which can achieve permitting in as few as six months, those states with longer permit timeframes experience reduced interest and missed economic development opportunities.”

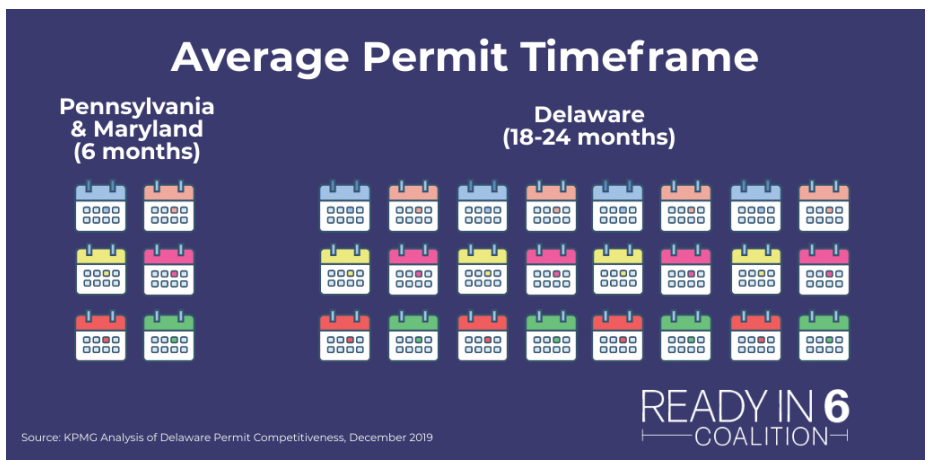
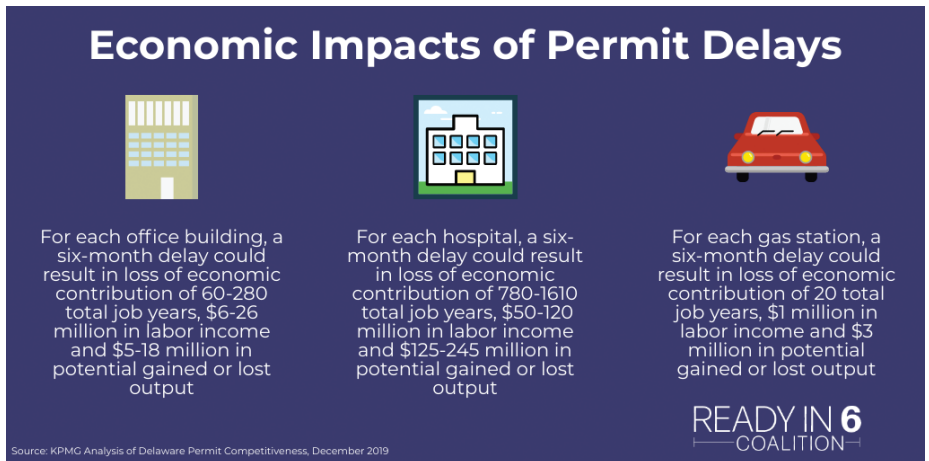
In response to these challenges, the business community has formed the Ready in 6 Coalition, which is committed to cutting the permitting timeline from 24 months to six months to make Delaware more competitive with other states.

Based on the report’s recommendations, the Ready in 6 Coalition is committed to working with state and county leaders to make improvements in three key areas to streamline the permitting process in Delaware: Enhance communication, increase efficiency and reduce paperwork, and track and use data more effectively.

Recommendations for improved communication including creating a state project concierge to help

streamline communication among state agencies; creating a permitting action committee to help with implementation of permit process improvements; integrating information technology solutions among the state, counties and cities; and implementing permit-focused economic development training to improve cooperation and coordination.

As for increasing efficiency and reducing paperwork, the analysis recommends creating a prioritization program for significant economic development projects; streamlining and strengthening the Department of Transportation’s review process to ensure all departments review and provide comments on proposals during the initial review cycle;



implementing Transportation Improvement Districts in targeted areas; and implementing prepackaged approvals for targeted investment sites.

Finally, Delaware does a poor job of tracking and using data to identify potential opportunities. The analysis suggests generating data that measures permit process timelines, allowing regulators to develop key performance indicators and drive accountability among permitting agencies. Additionally, Delaware needs to capture more and better economic development data to better understand new, missed and lost opportunities, helping the state to constantly improve as it seeks to attract employers.

Coupled with low taxes, a prime location and a high-quality workforce, a more favorable permitting environment would make it significantly more likely that Delaware would be more competitive as we work to grow, retain and attract businesses to our state. We are committed to working together and with the Legislature to strengthen the economic development in Delaware to make the state more viable for generations to come.

To do so, we must be Ready in 6. ■



Robert Perkins is the Executive Director of the Delaware Business Roundtable.

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