



A Long-Term Roadmap for Delaware's Economic Recovery

BY ROBERT PERKINS

WITH DELAWARE EMERGING from the coronavirus pandemic, business leaders and policymakers must work together to address many of the long-term challenges and shortfalls that the shutdown exposed in the state.

These include the need to retrain our workforce to meet the needs of a new economy, ensuring we have sites ready for businesses seeking to relocate, increasing access to broadband in Delaware, and enacting short- and long-term regulatory relief.

The Governor, General Assembly and business community must act sooner than later to ensure Delaware is in position to rebound as quickly and fully as possible while building a long-term economy that is competitive with neighboring states and is able to withstand the ups and downs caused by external forces large and small.

Workforce Retraining: There is a significant population in Delaware of underemployed workers who require additional skills training to fill jobs in skilled trades, health care and information technology at our hospitals, banks, and manufacturing floors.

This will require a substantial investment by the state and federal government to cover training costs and living expenses for at least 500 trainees per year and provide for living expenses during training. This would lead to higher wages, higher tax revenues and a diminished need for social services over time.

Site Readiness: Delaware should increase the availability of infrastructure-ready sites in each of our three counties that can be marketed by the Delaware Prosperity Partnership to quickly create more job opportunities – especially as businesses begin to consider looking outside of major metropolitan areas as part of their business continuity plans in the wake of the pandemic.

Broadband in Delaware: If the COVID 19-pandemic has taught us anything, it is the critical importance of internet availability so employees can work at home, students can take classes and study at home, doctors can practice telemedicine, and people can buy groceries and other goods online. However, many Delawareans – an estimated 127,700 in rural parts

of Sussex and Kent counties – lack the internet capabilities they need. It is clear that high speed internet must be available for all Delawareans – and the state must accelerate this effort.

Short-Term Regulatory Relief: With the economy all but stalled, there are construction projects teetering between go/no-go completion decisions. Delaware can take steps to encourage those projects to proceed, including the removal of impact fees and permits from all municipalities for 18 months; eliminating the need for major record plan approval for redevelopment projects on sites with similar or less proposed square footage of facilities that already have existed on properties since 2000; and halting the “reset” requirement for traffic impact studies. Such regulatory relief must be considered for a number of other industries and areas of our economy based on the relative economic impact of the pandemic.

Ready In 6: In addition to short-term help, longer term regulatory certainty is vital to allow Delaware to compete with other states for jobs and investment. We recommend the state immediately adopt the recommendations in the “Ready in 6” initiative, designed to cut the permitting timeline from 24 months to six months to make Delaware more competitive with other states.

Specifically, the report recommends the state should stack permitting processes so reviews are conducted concurrently, create a permitting concierge to fast-track projects through the process, and eliminate the Preliminary Land Use Service, among other steps.

The business community stands ready to support Governor Carney and the General Assembly to build a robust and sustainable economic recovery.

But we must act quickly to ensure our employers – and the economy as a whole – are able to rebound as fully as possible. ■



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