

Working Together to Retain and Attract Jobs to Delaware

BY ROBERT W. PERKINS

WITH THE 2020 ELECTION behind us and the state still coping with the COVID-19 pandemic for the foreseeable future, it is the perfect time for state leaders to come together to enact economic policies that will make the state more attractive to existing or potential new employers.

Delaware already has taken important steps to help retrain workers who lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. With Governor Carney's leadership and the support of the Workforce Development Board and other partners, the State established Forward Delaware, a program designed to help jobseekers find training and enhance or gain skills and employers connect with a qualified workforce.

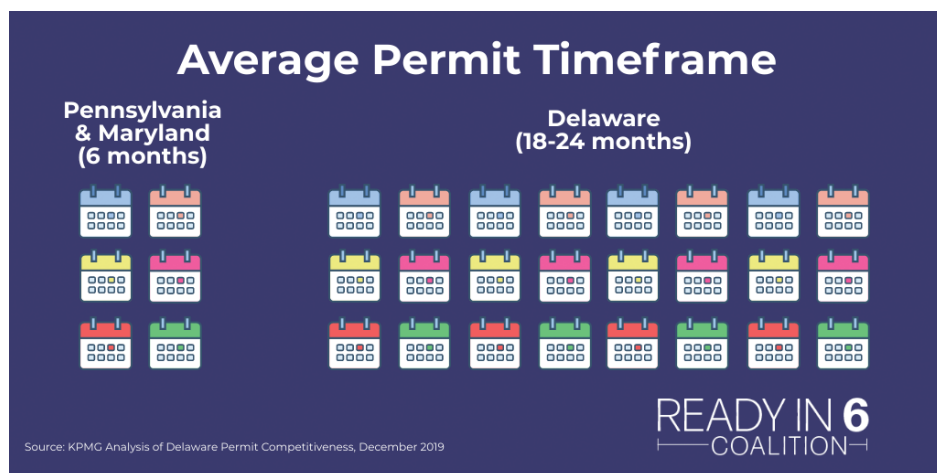
But there is much more to be done. We must start with a top priority in our state's fight to retain and attract jobs to Delaware – the proposed Ready in 6 initiative, which is designed to make Delaware more economically competitive with other states by cutting the permitting timeline from 24 months to six months.

This initiative is needed because the permitting and regulatory process is too slow and cumbersome, especially compared to neighboring states. Delaware's approval process can stretch up to 24 months, placing the state at a distinct economic development disadvantage when it comes to attracting jobs and growing businesses, especially since approval timelines in Maryland and Pennsylvania are closer to six months.

These findings were included in an independent analysis conducted by professional services firm KPMG, which concludes that Delaware would be better positioned to attract high-paying jobs if its permitting processes were strengthened through enhanced communication, increased efficiency and less paperwork, and the tracking and use of data more effectively.

Recommendations for improved communication include 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 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. In fact, under former Secretary Jennifer Cohan's leadership, DelDOT has made significant strides toward a number of these goals, particularly for small businesses. DNREC and our county governments must scrutinize their processes and become more efficient as well.

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. Delaware needs to capture more and better economic development data to help 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 jobs, talent and investment to our state. We are committed to working together and with the Governor and General

Assembly to strengthen economic development in Delaware to make the state more viable for generations to come. ■



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