

Blueprint for a Stronger New Castle County Economy

New Castle County is an extraordinary county. It can be the commercial hub of the region and an ideal location to start and grow small and large businesses. In this era of innovation, quality, good paying jobs should be plentiful. But it takes leadership. And it requires a new direction.

Since 1996, over 20 large employers, companies like MBNA, Claymont Steel, GM, Chrysler and DuPont, have gone out of business, dramatically reduced their hiring in New Castle County or been effectively merged out of existence. Few large employers have risen to replace them. And our county leadership has offered no plan to attempt to replace that job loss. That is not acceptable.

Since 1996, thousands of large employers have been created across our nation. Too few of them are being created here in New Castle County. Creating an ecosystem for economic growth requires political leadership, collaboration across governments and effective partnerships with the private sector.

The consequence of this mass exodus reverberates in our job market, our housing market and our non-profit sector. It has dramatic consequences for our home values, the quality of our schools and the level of violent crime in our streets.

I have served as Governor Markell's adviser on innovation and entrepreneurship and created two award-winning small businesses. Last year, the state selected the top startups in Delaware to be in the first global virtual accelerator, One Million by One Million, and a selection committee of leading Delaware entrepreneurs selected one of my businesses for this unique opportunity.

There are many ways out of our current job rut, and we will pursue them aggressively. But at the heart of all of our initiatives is that same spirit of innovation that E.I. duPont brought to the banks of the Brandywine River in 1802. Whether at the Port of Wilmington or at Delaware Technology Park, at the Horn Center for Entrepreneurship, Middletown Business Incubator or the Mill, the solutions to our most pressing economic problems sit right here in front of us.



1. Reinventing our Economy for 2017 and Beyond

Two years ago I invested \$30,000 to create an e-commerce company using a piece of software that I co-wrote. With no additional investment, that company this year is on pace to generate nearly \$1 million in revenue. The company is also creating job and career opportunities and potentially early stage ownership for individuals with police records.

Leading a county that can assist, nurture and grow entrepreneurial ventures into small business, and small businesses into large businesses will dramatically change all corners of our county. It will improve opportunities for our children and reduce the rate of violent crime.

Government officials have often misunderstood reinventing our economy to mean selecting startup companies and investing in politically-connected private companies using your taxpayer dollars. Reinventing our economy means the creation of an enabling environment, removing the leading barriers to the growth of 21st century industries in New Castle County. When we create an enabling environment that aggressively attracts and retains leading entrepreneurs in certain industries, capital, companies and jobs should follow.

For example, four years ago one of Delaware's leading materials chemical engineers spoke with me about the shortage of wet laboratory space in New Castle County. Without affordable laboratory space to research and develop new chemistry, entrepreneurs and innovators in one of our leading industries, material chemicals, will establish their companies elsewhere. We need to address this issue and make such physical places centers of scientific innovation and new company formation.

Considerable work has been done mapping our economic assets and understanding the economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in our county. It is much easier to move capital than people. We will focus on investing in those industries where we know we already have certain global leading talent.

In collaboration with our state, municipal and non-profit partners, we should invest resources in our leading industries to create enabling venues, clusters of innovation and a supportive ecosystem in those industries in which we already have a significant base of talent.

Together, we can do this. By looking at the assets we have, understanding our own skills and talents right here in New Castle County, and turning those assets into engines of job creation, we will build a better future for all of us.

2. Job Creation as Crime Fighting

We will disproportionately focus our economic development efforts in those neighborhoods across our county where quality job opportunities are scarce and where violent crime is rampant. Both nationally and locally, there has been substantial research illustrating the inverse relationship between economic opportunity and crime rates. When economic opportunity disappears, violent crime spikes. In Delaware, research like the People's Report by Dr. Yasser Payne at the University of Delaware should drive our economic development policy-making.

Using modern crime mapping techniques, we know those areas in our county most severely impacted by violent crime. Our economic development office will seek to collaborate with communities and state and municipal governments to create career training opportunities and entrepreneurial endeavors to address the root economic causes of violence in our county.

As I have with Ecosandals and as a teacher at Prestige Academy, in neighborhoods where others see blight and hopelessness, we will dedicate county resources to economic tools that create communities of innovation, growth and equal opportunity.

3. Expanding Port Opportunities

We must expand our port assets immediately to create real, sustainable work opportunities for those communities that desperately need it. The Port of Wilmington has been an outstanding source of quality jobs for hard-working moderate income people for generations. The location, both with quick ocean access and efficient access to East Coast, Southeast and Midwest consumer markets, provides us with a tremendous market advantage over peer port assets along the mid-Atlantic. The high quality reputation and expertise of our union labor at the port is an additional source of strength.

For years, we have recognized the need to expand the existing port and the potential opportunity to build a new container port that could compete with some of the leading ports in the country. Certain global trends, including the expansion of the Panama Canal, make this need more urgent. The tremendous demand for high quality, moderate income job opportunities make expanding port opportunities among our highest economic development priorities.

I have had private sector experience as an attorney working on ports. There is the potential to create thousands of jobs, but we need to have a strong, sustainable plan and a reliable funding partner.

It is important that port development is supported by significant and quality private and governmental partners. It is vitally important that the governments of the state of Delaware and our county collaborate to turn this port development into a reality.

Our county government, collaborating with our union colleagues, will be an enthusiastic and collaborative partner of the Diamond State Port Corporation. We will partner with them to aggressively seek private and public investment, working with impacted communities and enabling land use ordinances and related regulations as is required to realize the large-scale job creation opportunities of the port.

4. Collaborative Economic Development

The state of Delaware has an economic development office that invests millions of dollars annually on economic development in New Castle County and in cities across the county. Several cities and towns in New Castle County have economic development offices and those offices cost taxpayers as well. It does not make sense for the county government to replicate state and city economic development efforts. In any economic development effort, we will look first to collaborate with state and municipal governments.

This collaboration should unlock additional resources. First, when evaluating certain transactions, the different governing units can share the cost of due diligence. Second, there is a value to scale. When the state, county and municipalities pool their economic development resources, there will be greater opportunity to engage in more substantial and meaningful projects.

We also should collaborate with the private and non-profit sectors, to develop industry priorities, to collaborate in economic development activities and to select specific opportunities. Relying on known private sector leaders to select the specific opportunities in which we make economic development investments will also help protect our taxpayer's interests. Politicians making business decisions with public dollars invites cronyism.

5. Supporting Small Business

We also must recognize that the economy is changing around us in dramatic ways, ways that must be reflected in our economic development policies. Since 1990, big business across the country eliminated 4 million jobs while small business added 8 million new jobs. The number of small businesses in the country has nearly doubled 49% since 1982. Small businesses now account for 55% of all jobs in the United States. But most local governments focus their economic development investments on big business.

Our county government needs to meet regularly with small business entrepreneurs. We must collaborate with state and municipal governments to remove barriers to job growth and to create enablers of job growth. Making small investments so 100 small businesses can each create 10 new jobs is often a better investment than gambling millions of dollars on a single large company creating 1000 jobs.

6. Aggressively Pursuing 21st Century Manufacturing

The disappearance of manufacturing jobs in the past several decades has been well-documented. Since 2010 alone, over 2000 manufacturing jobs have left the state of Delaware, and most of that job loss is in New Castle County. Tax savings, lower wages and other cost savings have forced many American manufacturers to move their production offshore in recent decades. Most economic development efforts in our state assume that manufacturing industries are gone forever. I believe there is significant opportunity to re-capture manufacturing.

In the past few years, however, American manufacturing has begun to come back. And New Castle County's leadership needs to make sure we are on the front lines of the return of American manufacturing. Wages in many developing economies have increased since offshoring started. Producing in developed economies like the United States has significant advantages in infrastructure. And as developed world customers have come to expect reduced delivery times, reshoring American

manufacturing has begun. New Castle County, with its ideal location, well-educated workforce and numerous vacant manufacturing venues, should benefit from this resurgence.

But it takes leadership. We will provide that leadership, collaborating with the state to appeal to on-shoring manufacturers to come home to New Castle County.

7. More Efficient Land Use

Four years ago Mr. Gordon ran on a platform of a land use code that was not working and needed to be revised. He was right, but he never made any revisions to the code. One land use professional with decades of county experience told me that five years ago there were about 25 commercial plans submitted for review each month. Now there are about two each month. A land use process where it takes over 12 months for the developer to receive permits and certificates to build something like a high school gym is a land use process that is not working. We can do better.

We will do better first by putting planning and land use professionals in charge of our planning and land use functions. We will further seek to harmonize state and county land use processes. It does not make sense, for example, for the state Department of Transportation to evaluate a plan and then the county's land use department does a separate transportation analysis of the same plan using different standards. We must determine which office is best situated to advance taxpayers interests and work to make that office more efficient. Land use policy and planning must be a transparent exercise in public service, not self-service.

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On an ordinary day, across our county, you can find Chilean bananas coming through our port. You can find scientists editing genetic materials, leading a global effort to fight numerous diseases. You can find farmers growing soybeans. You can find world class scholars teaching students from across the world in our colleges and universities. We have extraordinary economic assets, an ideal location, an educated workforce and a tradition of entrepreneurship.

But we need to do much better. Global factors and lack of strategic economic leadership in our county have threatened several of our core industries. Our county government is too often a barrier to economic growth in the region or irrelevant to it.

With leadership and a collaborative spirit, we will do better.

Join the movement for a lean, clean and high-quality New Castle County government at www.mattmeyer2016.com.