

## **City of Oil City, Pennsylvania**

### ***Downtown Economic Development Strategy***

Two community stakeholder meetings were held for Oil City business and community leaders. These sessions took place at the Clarion State University Oil City Campus on March 2 and at the Transit Building in downtown Oil City on March 3, 2005. Both meetings were designed to assess the assets and liabilities of Oil City, identify opportunities and lay down some general priorities for reviving the City's downtown economy. Approximately 25 persons attended the first meeting and another 40 participated the following morning. An outline of the input received in the focus groups follows:

#### **Oil City Assets**

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Location on Routes 8 and 62 to the Allegheny National Forest  
Proximity to urban centers  
Historical assets  
North side renaissance projects  
Livable community environment  
Good infrastructure  
Good housing values  
"Med's and ed's" (medical and educational resources)  
Oil Creek State Park and plentiful outdoor recreation  
Many information centers (museums, C-O-C, etc.) are available to serve travelers  
Strong sense of community  
Allegheny River  
Justus Park, Hasson Park and other community recreation facilities  
Retail and office space available  
Excellent water supply and quality  
Inexpensive land  
Full-service hotel  
Attractive streetscape  
Museums  
Strong school system, K through College (including Clarion University and Dubois College)  
Good work ethic  
Bike trail and walking tours available  
Dramatic terrain  
Casual/comfortable restaurants  
Sense of economic momentum  
2,000 workers downtown daily

#### **Oil City Liabilities**

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Inadequate parking  
Utility infrastructure inadequate and high-priced  
Technology that is lacking (e.g. broadband service)  
A shrinking population  
Lack of quality job opportunities  
Skilled labor that has migrated out  
Downtown building overhead costs that are discouraging

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Building maintenance issues downtown that create image problems  
Potential for flooding (rare)  
Lack of town square exists as a central focus to the downtown  
Cultural performance environment that is lacking  
Weather that can be a problem  
A River divides the City  
Deteriorating buildings  
Unattractive gateways  
Bike path and railroad that don't reach downtown  
Influx of a welfare-reliant society  
Highest tax millage (when combined with school) in the County  
Lack of conference facilities  
One-way streets that make for awkward traffic flow patterns  
Vacant 2nd and 3rd stories on main routes through the City  
Lack of manufacturing space  
Lack of concentrated retail areas  
Oil City is “topographically challenged: with a terrain that makes traffic flow difficult  
Regulations can be cumbersome: must “manage the turnaround” rather than “contain growth”

## **Oil City Opportunities**

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Train excursions and other tourism projects to draw people downtown  
Service-related opportunities (dispersed satellite locations)  
Pulling more of the traffic flow to Forest/Warren through Oil City  
Selling to outdoor recreation market (e.g. outfitting businesses)  
River recreation/homesites/restaurants  
Retirement-related businesses and others selling to this population  
Selling the local architecture as an attraction  
Building on "med's & ed's" businesses and institutions  
Selling to the large student population (using shuttles?)  
Developing additional restaurants  
Marketing Oil City successes, building and capitalizing on existing activity  
Developing a downtown map  
Emphasizing Routes 8 and 62 for new development  
Exploiting college growth opportunities  
Transportation development  
Creating more downtown activity with continuous event programs  
Promoting more bus tours  
Developing additional B & B's  
Promoting antique businesses and the arts in general  
Exploiting the 2nd home potential (even on 2d floors)  
Developing a "Wild, Wild East" theme around the oil baron history of the area  
Promoting more family activities for tourists  
Developing the workforce for the job potential we already have  
Regionally coordinating heritage tourism to create a critical mass of destinations and visibility  
Marketing Oil City to entrepreneurs in Northern Virginia and other high-cost locations

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## **Suggested Business Community Actions**

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Promoting more use of the C-O-C Business incubator  
Establishing longer store hours (especially on weekends and Sundays)  
Encouraging all to take more pride in the community by getting involved  
Conducting better outreach to seasonal visitors and others by existing businesses  
More cross-promotion of businesses  
Recognizing and promoting unique assets (e.g. music store)  
Improving Oil City gateways with better signage and other improvements  
Continuing renaissance projects  
Developing a new local brand image for "oil" that emphasizes its culture and history  
Completing a downtown inventory of available space and needs  
Shifting services to upper stories to make room for retail  
Making additional aesthetic improvements to buildings and streetscapes  
Pursuing a comprehensive marketing strategy based on events and tourism  
Promoting better property maintenance along Rt. 8 and 62  
Building upon the successful Oil Heritage Festival  
Creating merchant culture of success and growth, rather than short-term survival

## **Suggested Government Actions**

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Improving code enforcement within the Business District  
Streamlining codes and eliminating of disincentives  
Using CDBG funds to eliminate/cleanup unusable properties for redevelopment  
Taking advantage of historic renovation grants  
Using PennDOT funding to improve access to Oil City and improve signage off Rt. I-79  
Developing a more organized political lobby for rural PA  
Continuing the consolidation of economic development efforts to improve the focus  
Improving broadband services  
Improving methods of capturing through traffic by managing signage and routings  
Using eminent domain to deal with white elephant structures where necessary  
Keeping infrastructure up to date by constantly evaluating capacity  
Establishing a 1-stop center for coordinating development projects (ombudsman)  
Marketing buildings and assets better  
Revising the B & B regulations to promote this activity  
Developing a better design review procedure for new development  
Maintaining good emergency services  
Encouraging more events in Justus Park  
Maintaining and replacing street signs  
Developing a better taxing system  
Investing in Routes 8 and 62  
Creating better Allegheny National Forest directional signage  
Improving views of the Allegheny River  
Articulating and IMPLEMENTING a long term vision and action plan that includes ongoing business/government partnerships