

WEST CHESTER

BIDDING ON THE FUTURE OF MAIN STREET



West Market Street, West Chester, PA

RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR REVITALIZATION

In the late 1990s, West Chester, a community in Southeastern Pennsylvania, was in need of revitalization. The borough was losing businesses, going from five department stores and three hotels to none of either — and low commercial property values prevented property owners from investing in or rebuilding their structures, even in the case of fire damage. Damaged structures simply became teardowns. The crime rate was high, and West Chester's main intersection — High Street and Gay Street — a former epicenter of activity contained vacant buildings on all four corners.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR A STRONGER COMMUNITY

To address the borough's mounting economic distress, the West Chester Business Improvement District (BID) was established in 2000, led by Executive Director and Downtown Development Specialist Malcolm Johnstone. This sparked the beginning of West Chester's remarkable revival and recovery. The BID went on to utilize DCED programs and leverage partnerships with other organizations to rebuild the Borough of West Chester — including with the Borough of West Chester, the Greater West Chester Chamber of Commerce, and the West Chester Police Department.

The West Chester BID received a Keystone Communities designation, which enabled it to receive nearly \$1 million in funding from the PA Department of Community & Economic Development. This included \$600,000 through the Elm Street Program to improve a neighborhood adjacent to the BID, and \$150,000 in matching funds to support local commercial façade improvements, streetscape improvements on Market Street, and destination marketing projects.

CASE STUDY



COMMUNITY
West Chester

REGION
Southeast Pennsylvania

POPULATION
18,968

IMPACT

- Transformed the landscape from blighted to vibrant
- Crime rate cut in half
- A renewed sense of place and community with a thriving small business community
- Visitors now see West Chester as a destination for events, arts, and culture

"The partnerships we have garnered with DCED are second to none, in my opinion. With the Keystone Communities Program, we've been able to attract close to \$1 million in funding and grants, which is really effective in a town of around 19,000 people."

— Malcom Johnstone,
Executive Director and Downtown
Development Specialist,
West Chester Business
Improvement District (BID)

WEST CHESTER



TRANSFORMATION INTO A DOWNTOWN DESTINATION

Today, West Chester is a thriving and vibrant community with many opportunities for continued growth. As of 2016, it has one hotel and a second one on the drawing board. The crime rate has declined by about half, and communities are being rebuilt and enhanced. The Borough of West Chester has a substantial small business community, and all four corners at the intersection of High Street and Gay Street are now occupied — including a Starbucks, Iron Hill Restaurant & Brewery, Rite Aid and Lorenzo and Sons Pizza.

West Chester is one of 10 national semifinalists in the 2017 Great American Main Street Awards, which recognizes outstanding Main Street programs across the United States. If West Chester is ultimately selected as three awardees in May 2017, it will be the first time in nearly 20 years that a Pennsylvania community will have earned the distinction.

Keystone Communities Program

The Keystone Communities (KC) program encourages partnerships between the public and private sectors that jointly support local revitalization initiatives for growth and stability of neighborhoods and communities; social and economic diversity; and a strong and secure quality of life. The program allows communities to tailor the assistance to meet their needs. Visit dced.pa.gov/kcp to learn more.