

# Greater Reading

The Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading



GREATER READING: A CALL TO ACTION



# To: The Greater Reading Community

The Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading (ICGR) was started by several local business leaders in response to a challenge – and a commitment of support – by local elected political leaders. These early initiators recognized and stated that they wanted something different, something real, and something that would make an impact toward creating an exciting and vibrant future for the Greater Reading region. Our approach was based on a simple principle – quality of life begins with a healthy economy. Put more simply, we needed to provide jobs for our residents. And, given our recent history of losing so many jobs, this required us to begin to think about doing some things differently. The good news is that we found a widespread interest in bringing about the necessary changes. What we found lacking initially, at least, was the necessary consensus on priorities. The Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading set about to change this.

Our region is unique in many ways. Sure, we have our problems and challenges. Who doesn't? But we took account of these, dealt with them and focused most of our efforts on a very real set of opportunities. This we called "dealing with reality". And "dealing with reality" implies, first, that we recognize things as they actually are, not as we wish they might be or as we might remember them. Among today's realities, we all need to accept and come to terms with the following:

- The region cannot be successful without a vibrant urban core.
- A substantial percentage of residents in our urban core are (a) Latino and (b) recent arrivals.
- High wage commodity manufacturing jobs are a thing of the past throughout the northeast corridor.
- Business leaders looking from the outside for opportunities in the region do not know the difference between West Lawn, Cumru, Lower Heidelberg, West Reading, Muhlenburg, Lower Alsace, etc. In order to be successful, we must find a way to present ourselves to the world as a region, not a collection of competing political jurisdictions.
- Agriculture may be our number one industry – but it lacks the capacity to provide future job growth.
- The region's population is growing.
- Rolling back the clock is not an option.

"Dealing with reality" also requires that we carefully identify and calibrate those external forces that might influence our economic prospects. In doing so, we found:

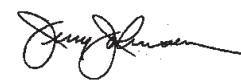
- Instead of looking at 385,000 actual residents of Berks County, we looked a little further and discovered an accessible workforce of 2.4 million within a 75-mile radius.
- And while we were looking up, we realized we are located 100 miles as the crow flies from the world's 16th largest economy – New York City.
- Yes, we have an underdeveloped surface transportation system. So does everybody else.
- On the other hand, we have a world class fiber optics network that goes to lots of interesting places.
- Nobody from somewhere else knows we're here. On the other hand, most people think they do know where Reading is.
- The Sovereign Center sells the hottest set of tickets in the country for an arena its size.
- Our local colleges hand out approximately 3,100 diplomas each and every year.
- People tell us this is a good place to raise a family.

And, finally, "dealing with reality" requires us to focus on economic development prospects that are both possible and desirable. In the case of the Greater Reading region, we have steered away from investing time and money in efforts to relocate the Yuengling Brewery from Pottsville to Reading (yes, it was suggested as a possibility). And we have steered away from recommending that we pursue the development of large box distribution centers because the data suggests our residents are reluctant to chew up our landscapes and our viewpoints for low-paying jobs.

As a result, after we sorted through all the data and all the opinions and all the disappointments and all the hopes, we came up with a short list of "to do's":

- Let's really make this a great place to live. Let's reinvent our urban core as something exciting, attractive and fun.
- Let's spend a bit more time focusing on our assets and a little less time on our liabilities. And let's see if we can create some packaging and promotion ideas to attract more visitors (preferably visitors with positive balances on their credit cards).
- Let's invent a new way of thinking about ourselves – the "Outlet Capital of the World" should be retired with no regrets. It served us well for a time. And let's tell everybody what we come up with.
- Let's capitalize on our geography and our telecommunications capability and go after Wall Street – why not?
- But, most of all, let's take a step beyond, "You take care of yours and I'll take care of mine," and begin to work together on bringing new kinds of jobs to our region.

  
John J. Dever, Jr.  
Co-chair

  
Jerry Johnson  
Co-chair

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Greater Reading: A Call to Action

The Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading (ICGR) brings together people from a myriad of backgrounds to shape the future of our community. The ICGR conclusions and recommendations point the way for Greater Reading to become an economically competitive region in the 21st century. For the Greater Reading region to be successful in the long-term, it has to be a place where innovation and entrepreneurship thrive and the quality of life attracts a diverse community. The ICGR market-based strategy sets priorities, integrates and accelerates existing efforts and pinpoints ways to strengthen Greater Reading's competitive position.

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### ICGR VISION STATEMENT

The Greater Reading region will be a place with a vibrant urban core, where entrepreneurship and innovation flourish and the region's diversity is leveraged to enable everyone to prosper.

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Throughout the ICGR process, defining how to compete has been a priority. Every element of this plan is oriented towards helping the region succeed in an evolving global market. Professor Michael E. Porter from Harvard Business School says, "The first part of being competitive is choosing to compete." For the Greater Reading region this means developing the perceptions, institutions, and leadership that will make the region a legitimate contender in the global marketplace. Success also requires a strategy where all of Greater Reading's major initiatives are effectively linked and the economically distressed inner city area and residents benefit from participation in the wider regional economy.

### Public- Private Collaboration

The Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading brought together public and private sector leaders to develop a plan for the region's economic future. In November 2003, the Mayor of Reading and the Berks County Commissioners, asked the private sector to join forces with them on a major economic development initiative. This request led to the Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading (ICGR), which John Dever and Jerry Johnson volunteered to lead.

### PRIMARY GOAL OF ICGR

Create a healthier regional economy by:

1. Attracting and retaining jobs;
2. Improving the overall regional business environment;
3. Increasing the competitiveness of businesses in core urban sections of the region; and
4. Strengthening and building links between the urban core and the regional economy.

The Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC) was engaged to help shape a competitive strategy for the Greater Reading area. ICIC is a national nonprofit organization that works with leaders across the country to help generate jobs, income and wealth for low-income inner city residents. ICIC was founded in 1994 by Harvard Business School Professor Michael E. Porter, an international authority on strategy and competitiveness. For the past decade, ICIC has focused its efforts on revitalizing America's economically distressed inner cities through a unique market-based approach involving private and public partnerships. According to ICIC research, inner cities offer competitive advantages for business growth creating jobs, income and wealth for residents in the region.

ICGR engaged a diverse group of people within the Greater Reading community to build an action plan. All agreed that Greater Reading is at a turning point. Strategic choices must be made to establish a shared vision of the future and a forceful economic agenda. Fortunately, initiatives were already underway that focused on many of the challenges facing the region. However, they tended to be fragmented and suffered from low visibility. Greater Reading: A Call to Action brings together a variety of initiatives already underway and guides the choices required to prioritize regional projects.

The county comprehensive plan for the region is Berks Vision 2020. Greater Reading: A Call to Action supports the key elements of Berks Vision 2020 and proposes specific actions to help Berks Vision 2020 become a reality. In addition, we are extremely fortunate that so many of the region's major ongoing initiatives fit so well with the plan – for example: GoggleWorks, RiverPlace, Our City Reading, the West Reading Main Street Program, the Wyomissing Square project, and the 7th and Penn Convention Center project.

### GREATER READING AT A GLANCE

#### Population Growth

In contrast to most of Pennsylvania, Berks County is increasing in population. There are two dynamics driving this population growth: The expansion of the Philadelphia metropolitan economy to the eastern edge of Berks County and the growth of the Latino population in the City of Reading.

#### Increasing Diversity

Due to the Latino migration to Berks County, the Greater Reading region is becoming increasingly diverse. The Latino population is overwhelmingly living in the City of Reading, while the areas around Reading are demographically not changing.

#### Business Clusters of Strength

The Greater Reading region has experienced significant growth in the Business Services cluster and continues to be a competitive performer in the Financial Services cluster. Food Processing is an extremely strong traded cluster in the Greater Reading region and in the counties to the south and west of Berks.

#### Manufacturing

The Greater Reading region continues to be home to many manufacturing companies. Over 20% of the jobs in Berks County are in Manufacturing — well above the national average of just below 13%. However, this industry has been in decline nationally, a trend also affecting Berks County.

## Market-Based Approach to Revitalization

Economic development at the regional level is a complex process. Many factors, including housing, health care, education and childcare, contribute to improving conditions in low-income areas. However, investing in these alone will not create a sustainable economic base in Greater Reading. Sustainable economic development will occur only as it has elsewhere, by employing an economic strategy that emphasizes private, for-profit business growth and job development.

To realize the economic potential of Reading and all its residents, ICIC provided ICGR with a model for economic development focused on:

- Enhancing competitive advantages. The region has unique assets that provide significant economic potential. Only by focusing on these strengths will Reading realize a more positive future.
- Identifying and developing investment opportunities that will have the greatest impact on the regional economy.
- Collaboration between the public and private sectors. Successful economic development depends on the public and private sectors finding effective ways of sharing ideas and working together.
- Enabling the creation of jobs and wealth for low-income residents. The problems of the inner city cannot be solved with social services alone, and a successful regional economy depends on improving conditions in the inner city and providing opportunities to economically distressed residents.
- Working at the regional level as well as the neighborhood level. The success of the two are interdependent.

When Greater Reading: A Call to Action is successfully implemented, the region will have:

- A comprehensive market-based strategy.
- A leadership group with a shared vision and a commitment to interventions that make the economy more competitive and productive.
- A well-defined strategy to leverage public and private resources to the region's greatest advantage.



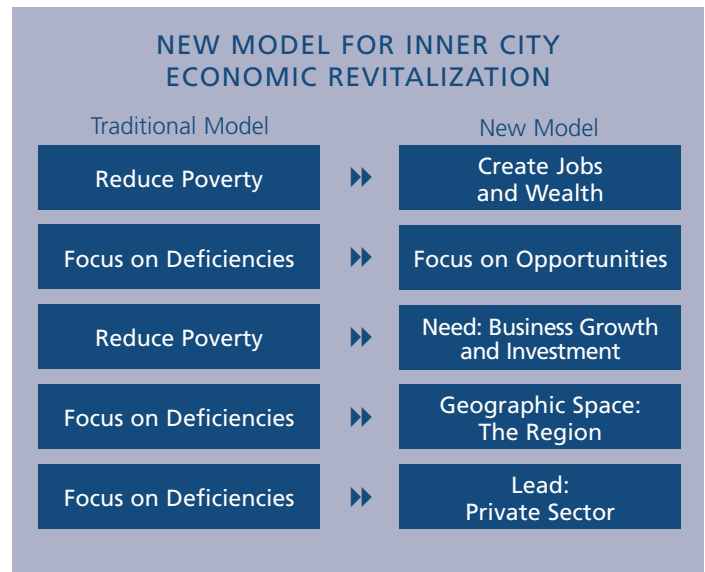
Employees at Bills Khakis, a fast-growing khaki manufacturer in Reading, PA.

## Action Plan

To identify specific action recommendations, ICGR focused on: 1. Business Clusters and 2. Crosscutting Issues. The purpose of dealing with both in a coordinated way was to:

- Develop firms that could be competitive in their operation and strategy; and
- Create coordinated efforts across economic development initiatives to increase competitiveness.

These plans were developed by the more than 130 volunteers as members of ICGR Action Teams.



## COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES OF THE REGION

### Proximity to Markets

The Greater Reading region is within 500 miles of 40 percent of the U.S. population. There are few places that have comparable access to such a large and wealthy market.

### Quality of Life

The Greater Reading region has a variety of amenities that are typically only available in large urban areas, while still having an abundance of open space available for recreation. This is a unique and valuable combination.

### Cost of Living

While Reading and Pennsylvania are not the lowest-cost places to do business, the cost of land, energy, and labor is highly competitive with other locations that have comparable access to New York, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C.

### Diversity

The region is attracting people and that is increasing the diversity of the population, creating a richer mix of activities available in the area and providing a bilingual workforce.

### Workforce

The local workforce is consistently recognized as having an outstanding work ethic.

# 1. Business Clusters

A significant portion of ICIC's analysis and program development focuses on clusters. Clusters are geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field that both cooperate and compete. Clusters encompass industry competitors, as well as suppliers, buyers, firms in related fields, specialized educational institutions and support services that are concentrated in particular locations. Examples of well-known clusters include high-technology in the Silicon Valley and filmmaking in Hollywood.

Fostering development at the cluster level improves the prospects for individual firms within the cluster. Strengthening the connections between companies and specialized institutions leads to enhanced productivity and innovation. ICGR chose to focus on advancing the collective potential of clusters rather than individual firms to maximize long-term economic impact.

After considering the potential of 10 industry clusters, ICGR decided to focus its efforts on three:

- Entertainment, Hospitality, and Tourism
- Professional and Shared Services
- Food Processing

## Opportunities and Recommendations

### OPPORTUNITY #1 – MAKING THE CORRIDOR AN ATTRACTION

#### Opportunity:

Link Reading, West Reading, and Wyomissing's hospitality and tourism developments, like hotels and restaurants, into a single destination. This entertainment zone, called, "the Corridor," will elevate the profile of Greater Reading as a popular and fun destination.

#### Recommendations:

- Develop a comprehensive plan for a pedestrian friendly environment.
- Introduce thematic public art.
- Establish financial incentives.
- Create a management structure.

### OPPORTUNITY #2 – MARKETING THE REGION'S TOURISM ATTRACTIONS

#### Opportunity:

Increase the capacity to market tourism attractions in the Greater Reading region.

#### Recommendations:

- Refine tourism marketing strategy.
- Create a list of area attractions and a community calendar.
- Increase promotion and outreach capability.

### OPPORTUNITY #3 – LEADERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL AND SHARED SERVICES

#### Opportunity:

Develop the Greater Reading region as a premier location for Back Office Services.

#### Recommendations:

- Aggressively market Berks County.
- Attract outsourced operations for major financial institutions.
- Establish a deal management process.
- Aggressively market and promote "Greater Reading."

### OPPORTUNITY #4 – COMPETITIVENESS IN FOOD PROCESSING

#### Opportunity:

Leverage the strength of the food processing industry in Greater Reading.

#### Recommendations:

- Develop a Nutrition and Wellness Corridor, a food engineering and science park.
- Target food processing workforce development initiatives.
- Improve access to I-78.

# 2. Crosscutting Issues

The Strategy Board identified certain issues that affected every cluster. Four cross-cutting issues were selected based on surveys of residents, businesses, leaders and experts across the region. These are:

- Inner City Competitiveness.
- Innovation in Manufacturing.
- Regional Communications and Branding.
- Economic Development Coordination.

## Opportunities and Recommendations

### OPPORTUNITY #1 – LEVERAGE THE INNER CITY AS AN ASSET

#### Opportunity:

Increase Greater Reading's inner city competitiveness by focusing on its diverse leadership, active business community, and young entrepreneurs. Encouraging entrepreneurship among inner-city residents will build business capacity in the city and the region.

#### Recommendations:

- Engage and develop inner-city business leaders.
- Establish the Berks County Latino Chamber of Commerce.
- Develop a Mercado, a business incubator.
- Launch NFTE, a youth entrepreneurship program.
- Expand the Micro+ loan program.

### OPPORTUNITY #2 – INCREASE COMPETITIVENESS OF MANUFACTURING

#### Opportunity:

Aggressively pursue innovation in Greater Reading's manufacturing cluster.

#### Recommendations:

- Pilot an Innovation Portal.
- Implement "Dream It, Do It" communications campaign.
- Explore Innovation Demonstration Fund.
- Coordinate manufacturing support organizations in the region.

### OPPORTUNITY #3 – COMMUNICATE THE NEW IMAGE OF THE GREATER READING REGION

#### Opportunity:

Change Greater Reading's image among local community, visitors, and business interests both within and outside the region.

#### Recommendations:

- Celebration event.
- Create "1000 Friends of Greater Reading."
- Launch the new community brand.

## OPPORTUNITY #4 – FOSTER COLLABORATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### Opportunity:

Increase cooperation in economic development activity in the Greater Reading region through the Berks Economic Partnership.

### Recommendations:

- Coordinate business attraction efforts.
- Support the major initiatives underway.
- Prioritize funding requests.

## Implementation – Creating a Powerful Economy in Greater Reading

ICGR has identified the following key drivers for a successful implementation of its vision:

- Community support for the ICGR Vision and ability to communicate the depth and breadth of that support.
- Committed implementation partners to take action on the recommendations made in this plan.
- Sustained, effective leadership of the continued planning and coordination required to make this plan a reality.
- Funding for implementation of specific recommended actions from public and private sector sources.
- Political support for the vision and recommendations.
- Continued planning to adjust to the evolving economic and demographic situation in the Greater Reading region and to keep this plan fresh and relevant.

Implementation of the ICGR recommendations will be coordinated by the Berks Economic Partnership (BEP). BEP is ideally suited to play the coordination role required. In many cases the specific recommendations outlined above will be led by other economic development organizations (such as the Reading and Berks County Visitors Bureau focusing on

Tourism), while BEP focuses on enabling coordination and cooperation. In this aspect of its larger role, the BEP should be responsible for three key functions:

### Funding

Coordinate fund raising with the implementation partners on each program. The BEP should help assemble a comprehensive plan for projects and access funds from public and foundation sources.

### Management

Each recommendation has specific outcomes associated with it. The BEP should receive regular reports on the implementation of each Action Plan and its ability to deliver on the expected outcomes. The BEP should coordinate with all of the implementing entities to track progress, ensure adequate resources are being provided, and to adjust initiatives as appropriate.

### Planning – a continuous process

New clusters need to be targeted and new investment programs identified. The BEP should take the lead on this planning effort. For Greater Reading: A Call to Action to be successful it needs to evolve for a constantly changing economic environment and competitive landscape.

## Launching a New Greater Reading

With the above recommendations, the Greater Reading region has a clear path to addressing its challenges, increasing its competitiveness, and realizing the vision of a better future. This path and vision will be outlined to the community at the ICGR celebration, on September 16th, 2005. This will be a chance to come together and celebrate the first day of a new era in the Greater Reading region. This event will not mark the end of a journey, but a first step toward creating a vibrant Greater Reading for future generations to enjoy.

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## Acknowledgements

The work presented in this report would not have been possible without the hours of support and commitment from community volunteers and the Project Management team. The project leaders and participants listed in this report all demonstrated a commitment to new ideas and a new way of viewing the region that made this project possible. The Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC), led by Harvard Business School Professor Michael E. Porter, has helped develop this plan for linking the Greater Reading region with its inner city.

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State Senator Mike O’Pake  
State Representative Tom Caltagirone  
State Representative Dante Santoni  
State Representative Dave Argall

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The Berks Economic Partnership (County of Berks)  
The Wyomissing Foundation  
The Janssen Foundation  
Sovereign Bank  
Wachovia Bank  
National Penn Bank  
Leesport Bank  
UGI Utilities  
Met-Ed/ A FirstEnergy Company  
Greater Berks Development Fund  
Stevens & Lee/Griffin Financial Group

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Sovereign Bank  
Stevens & Lee/Griffin Financial Group  
Bosco’s  
The Berks County Community Foundation  
Greater Berks Development Fund  
Manufacturers Association of Berks County

# PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

(Team Co-Chairs listed first)

## Strategy Board

Name	Title	Organization
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John Dever	President/COO	Bills Khakis
Al Boscov	Chairman	Boscov's Department Stores
Dave Trego	President & CEO	UGI
Nelson DeLeon	Owner	America at Work
Mike Ehlerman	Chairman & CEO	Yuasa Battery, Inc.
Jon Scott	President & CEO	Berks Economic Partnership
Julia Klein	President & CEO	CH Briggs Hardware
Sid Kline	Counsel	Stevens & Lee
Dick Kratz	President	Reading Area Community College
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Adam Mukerji	Director Community Development	City of Reading
Michael Mullen	President	SFS Intec
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Joni Naugle	Director	Susquehanna Patriot Bank
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Tom McMahon	Mayor	City of Reading
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## Project Management Team

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## Entertainment, Hospitality and Tourism Action Team

Name	Title	Organization
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Bob Cavaliere	General Manager	Sovereign Center
Jim Bocosky	General Manager	Sheraton
Chuck Domino	General Manager	Reading Phillies
John Ernesto	Director, Director Marketing and Promotions	Berks Jazzfest, Reading Eagle Company
Ginny Hand	Executive Assistant to the Mayor	City of Reading
Judy Henry	Owner	Judy's on Cherry
Ted Kolva	Facility Director	Body Zone
Sam Loth	Executive Director	West Reading Main Street Program

Rick McDougall	Vice President	Burkey Group
Ronald Roth	Museum Director and CEO	Reading Public Museum
Dolly Vogt	Director of Sales and Marketing	Sovereign Center
Al Weber	President	Tweed Weber Strategic Planning

## Corridor Team

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## Packaging and Promotion Team

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## Food Processing Team

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## Communications Team

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## Branding Team

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John Ernesto	Director Director Marketing and Promotions	Berks Jazzfest, Reading Eagle Company
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Bill Thomas	CEO/Founder	Bill's Khakis
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Al Weber	President	Tweed Weber Strategic Planning
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John Weidenhammer	President	Weidenhammer Systems Corporation

## Latino Business Leaders Team

Name	Title	Organization
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Rocio Damato	Partner	Café de Gemelli
Jonathan Encarnacion	Executive Director	Centro Hispano Daniel Torres
Josephina Encarnacion	Partner	Café de Gemelli
Angel Figueroa	VP Resource Development	I-LEAD
Nitza Fontanez	Owner	Nitza's Hair Design
George A. Gonzalez	Esquire	
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Pedro Lorenzi	Owner	Pedro Lorenzi Salon
Jose Madrigal	Owner	City Real Estate
Felix Olivares	Realtor	Century 21 Call First
Jocelyn Olivares	Realtor	Century 21 Call First
Javier Ortega-Benitez	Owner	State Farm Insurance

## Innovation in Manufacturing Team

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Michael Mullen	President	SFS intec
Connie Faylor	Regional Manager	Ben Franklin Technology Partners
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Ed Swoyer	President	Greater Berks Development Fund
Shawn Anderson	President & CEO	Magnatech International L. P.
Richard L. Bashore	President	Reading Electric
Scott Carpenter	President	The Bachman Company
Charlotte B. Cooper	President	Standard Offset Printing Company
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### Elected Officials

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 State Representative Tom Caltigerone  
 State Representative Dante Santoni  
 State Representative Dave Argall  
 County Commissioner Judy Schwank  
 County Commissioner Tom Gajewski  
 County Commissioner Mark Scott  
 Reading Mayor Tom McMahon  
 West Reading Mayor Kevin Barnhard  
 Wyomissing Borough Council  
 President Fred Levering

### Partner Organizations

Berks County Community Foundation  
 Berks County Chamber of Commerce  
 Berks Economic Partnership  
 Manufacturers Association of Berks County  
 Workforce Investment Board  
 The Hispanic Center  
 Berks County Industrial Development Authority  
 I Lead  
 Penn State Berks/Lehigh  
 Reading and Berks County Visitors Bureau  
 Reading Area Community College  
 Berks Business Executives Forum

Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading

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