

Logo design by Clara Benton



ASHLEY VISION 2020

Today's Vision...
Tomorrow's Reality

A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



Photo Credits include Fred Adams, Frank Florianz & Ken Evans



Presented by
Jason Fitzgerald & Christine Kight
Penn Strategies
December 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Acknowledgements.....6**
 - Ashley Borough Officials 6
 - Ashley Borough Advisory Committee 7
- About Penn Strategies.....9**
- The Assignment10**
 - Scope..... 10
 - Methodology..... 11
 - Stakeholder Advisory Committee 11
 - Intuitive Interviews 12
 - SWOT 12
 - Data Collection & Interpretation 12
 - Feet on the Street 13
- Executive Summary.....14**
 - Ashley Today and Yesterday 14
 - Strengths 15
 - Weaknesses 17
 - Opportunities..... 17
 - Threats 19
- ASHLEY BOROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (DRAFT 1) 2

Advisory Committee Points of Discussion	20
Mainstreet	20
Huber-Breaker	21
Housing Stock.....	21
Image	22
Recreational Opportunities.....	22
Crime.....	23
Ashley Vision 2020 Plan Overview	24
Mainstreet	24
Huber Breaker.....	25
Housing Stock.....	26
Identity / Brand.....	27
Parks & Recreation Program.....	29
Crime & Drugs.....	29
Statistical Analysis & Interpretation	31
Ashley's MSA.....	31
Geography.....	31
Demography	32
Population.....	32
Income	33
Employment.....	34
 ASHLEY BOROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (DRAFT 1)	 3

Education	35
Homes	36
Families	37
Crime.....	38
Luzerne County	39
Geography.....	39
Demography	39
Population.....	40
Income	41
Employment.....	42
Education	44
Homes	45
Families	46
Crime.....	47
Ashley Borough	49
Geography.....	49
Demography	50
Population.....	50
Income	51
Employment.....	52
Education	53

Homes	54
Families	56
Crime.....	57
Conclusion	58

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Photo Credit: Samuel Zeller on Unsplash

ASHLEY BOROUGH OFFICIALS

Penn Strategies was hired by Ashley Borough, whose officials have offered support and local expertise throughout the process.

The following is a list of current Ashley Borough officials:

- Mayor, **Donald Sipple, Sr.**
- Borough Manager, **Greg Gulick**
- Police Chief, **David Fedorczyk**
- Police Sergeant, **Joseph McGlynn**
- Solicitor, **William E. Vinsko, Jr. Esquire**
- Zoning Officer, **Andy Kratz**
- Council President, **John Gibbons**
- Council Vice President, **Donald Sipple, Jr.**
- Council Member, **Brian Casey**
- Council Member, **Gerald Maldonado**
- Council Member, **Donna Schappert**
- Council Member, **Frank Sorokach**

ASHLEY BOROUGH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In April of 2017, Penn Strategies helped to form the Ashley Borough Stakeholder Advisory Committee, a non-partisan, diverse group made of local residents, business owners, and community leaders. Our goal was to obtain unbiased, non-political information to aid in the development of a comprehensive economic development strategy.

The following is a list of the members of the Ashley Borough Stakeholder Advisory Committee:

Ron Antolick	Borough resident, owner RACO Watch and Jewelry Store
Steve Biernacki	Owner of Kelsey’s Restaurant, Vietnam Veteran, member of the Board of Directors of the Huber Breaker Preservation Society
Carol Coleman	Borough resident, retired minister, community volunteer
Clyde Harvey	Borough resident and retired book editor
Pat Kennedy:	Borough resident, member of the Board of Directors of the Huber Breaker Preservation Society, and owner of K-Kleen, an Ashley based exhaust cleaning and fire protection business
Sol Kim	Borough resident, dentist, rental property owner

In addition to assisting with the development of the plan, it is our hope that these stakeholders will remain engaged as Ashley enters the implantation phase of this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. This Committee is uniquely positioned to help Penn Strategies and Borough leaders to implement the recommendations listed in the plan.

Securing “buy-in” from these individuals was a critical component of our work. Each of the policy recommendations listed later in this document were fully vetted by this group and has their total support. Any recommendations that did not receive their support after extensive discussion, were discarded. These vetted policy recommendations are outlined later in this plan.

The Ashley Borough Stakeholder Advisory Committee met on the dates listed below. These sessions lasted about two hours each. Selected notes from these meetings are available upon request.

- April 26, 2017
- May 10, 2017
- May 24, 2017
- June 7, 2017
- June 21, 2017
- July 19, 2017
- August 9, 2017

ABOUT PENN STRATEGIES



Penn Strategies mission is to create economic opportunity for Pennsylvania's businesses and communities. With offices in Watsonstown and Harrisburg, we provide economic development planning, grant writing, lobbying, public relations, consulting services and government and regulatory liaison to municipalities, corporations and organizations who are working to improve life for all Pennsylvanians.

Our team of professionals collectively offers many decades of diversified and robust experience, and strong relationships at the local, state and national level. We offer a documented track record of success and a resolute commitment to personal and thorough service to each and every one of our clients.

THE ASSIGNMENT



Photo Credit: Google Earth

SCOPE

As with many municipalities, Ashley Borough desires to enhance its downtown, improve its infrastructure and augment its cultural and recreational assets. While these aims will undoubtedly improve the community, The Borough faces the common challenges of increasingly limited resources and funding opportunities. Thus Ashley is faced with the need to prioritize its requirements and objectives for community improvement projects, in order to ensure that development interests and economic growth in the Borough are targeted, achievable and part of a long-term vision.

Penn Strategies was hired by the Borough to establish these economic development priorities and outline a plan for implementation. In a joint effort, Ashley Vision 2020 was conceived.

The goal of Ashley Vision 2020 is to provide a roadmap for the total redevelopment of Ashley Borough. This plan is intended to outline specific steps that, if taken, will make Ashley a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

Ashley Vision 2020 is the culmination of months of planning, analysis of economic trends, data gathering and interpretation, visioning, and prioritization. Both Ashley's past and future were taken into consideration. The process began in February of 2017, with the creation of the Ashley Borough Stakeholder Advisory Committee. The team's collective skill sets, varied expertise and institutional knowledge have resulted in this focused, thoughtful blueprint for growth in the Borough of Ashley.

Methodology

Penn Strategies utilized a five-tiered approach to Ashley Borough's Comprehensive Economic Development Plan. Our unique approach is designed for a highly intuitive and tailored outcome to ensure that we capture the most essential factors to Ashley's future success.

Stakeholder Advisory Committee

Creating a simple survey and identifying a representative sample of Ashley Borough residents would have allowed us the opportunity to identify a few basic priorities. However we wanted more extensive background information and prefer to develop recommendations based upon detailed, substantial conversations with community stakeholders.

So we asked Borough officials to identify a group of community leaders, "grass-tops" as we call them, who were "plugged into" the needs and concerns of the community. We wanted people who understood the history of Ashley and had a stake in its future. This group became Ashley Borough's Stakeholder Advisory Committee. By creating a Stakeholder Advisory Committee, we were able to use a "Focus Group Methodology" to collect information.

Another benefit of using this method is that the Stakeholder Advisory Committee may be kept in-tact by the Borough, and at the discretion of its members, to serve during the implantation phase of the Plan.

Intuitive Interviews

According to the Center for Assessment, Planning & Accountability, focus groups allow for greater insights into how people think, while surveys generally ask closed-ended questions that may limit the feedback that can be gained from a respondent.

Penn Strategies employs skilled focus group facilitators who know the right questions to ask and also understand the importance of non-verbal communication, probing, reflection, and avoiding “tells.” We used these skills with open-ended questions to help identify Ashley’s chief needs and concerns.

SWOT

We asked each member of the Committee to list the strengths and weaknesses of the Borough. We asked them not only to consider the Borough’s economic health but also its educational, environmental, and cultural conditions as well. This information was very helpful in completing our SWOT Analysis (an in-depth review of the regions strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). Collection of this information was the primary focus of our first two meetings.

For each of these strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats we asked stakeholders to expand upon their thinking and asked pointed questions aimed at responding to this SWOT Analysis with some specific policy recommendations.

Data Collection and Interpretation

Our approach to developing this plan also included an extensive review of data and trends in municipal planning, as well as research and evaluation of the demography and geography relevant to Ashley.

We compared these statistics with the stakeholder concerns, which as a general rule, were validated by the statistical data.

After these considerations, we offered details on several specific policy initiatives which have been effective in communities with similar characteristics to Ashley Borough.

Feet on the Street

Finally, we go a step further than many planning firms in that we begin and end “on the ground” – first in assessment and later in execution.

We make a point of seeing Ashley first-hand, driving and walking the streets, and observing first-hand the issues identified by the Advisory Committee. This informal component of our assessment helps us to relate to and comprehend the data we have gathered.

Following the formulation and presentation of the plan, we continue a presence as we assist Borough leaders and staff in its actual implementation. Penn Strategies will write all Borough Council Resolutions, and submit all grant applications which are deemed necessary.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Photo Credit: Google Earth; Logo Design: Clara Benton

Ashley Today and Yesterday

Ashley Borough is located in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. It is a 0.9 square mile borough that borders the City of Wilkes-Barre and Hanover Township. Flanked by the verdant slopes of Wilkes-Barre Mountain and bisected by the natural beauty of Solomon’s Creek, Ashley offers an ideal location from many vantage points.



Photo Credit: Dave Scherbenko / for The Citizens' Voice

Settled in 1830 and incorporated as a borough in 1870, Ashley was once a thriving coal mining town during the early 20th century. The life source for the Borough was the Huber Breaker (originally constructed in 1895 as the Maxwell Breaker) which separated coal from waste rock and impurities. Ashley Borough was the heart of the anthracite coal industry that powered the United States through two World Wars and helped to fuel the industrial revolution.

This proud history, along with Ashley’s current strengths and opportunities, pave the road to a promising future.

Strengths

Economically, thanks to the efforts of Borough leaders, Ashley Borough is on sound fiscal footing. The budget is balanced, debt is at a minimum and Borough tax rates are reasonable when compared to their immediate neighbors. Ashley has a 4.85 local millage rate, while Hanover Township charges a rate of 5.50 mills. The City of Wilkes-Barre charges 141.33 mills and levels a 3% earned income tax on residents and a 1% earned income tax on non-residents. This means that Ashley's cost of living index is even lower than Wilkes-Barre's, which is 12 points lower than the national average, making Ashley a supremely affordable place to live.



Ashley's climate is also a great advantage. Positioned in a temperate biome in which forests and grasslands thrive, and warm summers are relieved by autumnal color and winter flurries, the Northeast is a favored area for outdoor enthusiasts. Given the nation's increased focus on health, exercise and the salubrious benefits of nature, Ashley's temperate location and proximity to both outdoor recreation *and* urban amenities, adds to its livability and aesthetic beauty.

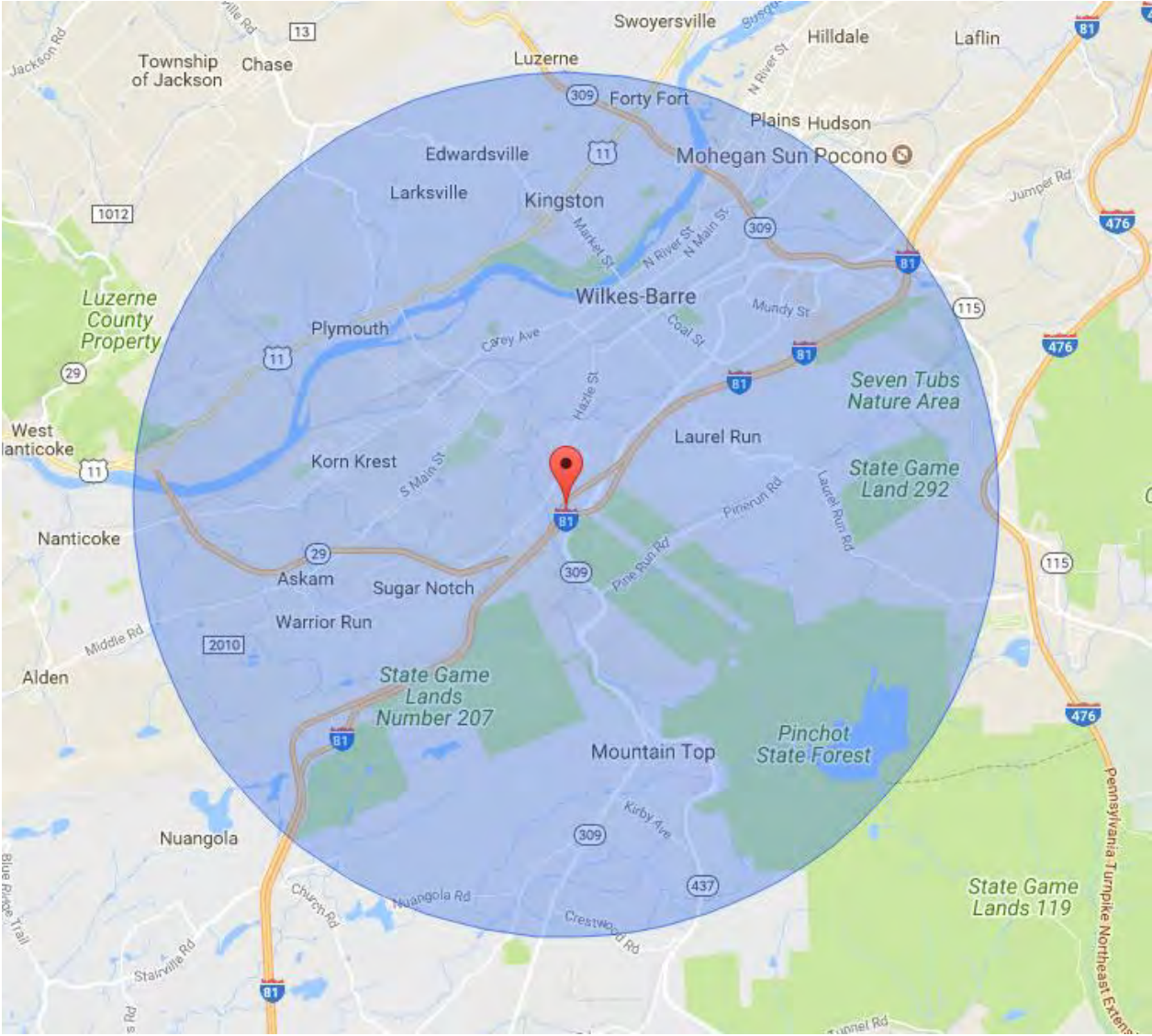


Seven Tubs Recreational Area

Regarding the issue of accessibility, a predominant factor in economic growth, Ashley has ready access to highways, busses and airports. Positioned just off exit 164 of Interstate 81, a 5 mile radius of Ashley offers access to routes 29, 11, 309 and 437. Ashley is also serviced by Luzerne County Transportation Authority's Route 13 Bus, and from their hub in Wilkes-Barre, The Martz Group offers extended travel opportunities to New York City and Philadelphia among other locations. Ashley is also a mere 12.6 miles from the Wilkes-Barre / Scranton International Airport (AVP). This all adds up to infinite possibilities for traveling beyond the area or within it, which expands choices for both commerce and lifestyle. That same 5 mile radius around Ashley offers access



to The Susquehanna River, The Seven Tubs Nature Area, State Game Lands and a State Forest, Crystal Lake and countless venues for shopping, entertainment and business in the greater Wilkes-Barre area.



A 5 Mile Radius of Ashley, PA

Some of Ashley’s additional strengths such as propinquity to major markets, health care systems, low cost energy and attractive labor pool are addressed in the Opportunities section.

Weaknesses

Since the closing of the Breaker in 1976, the Borough of Ashley, like many towns in Appalachia, has struggled to find a new identity.

Northeastern Pennsylvania in general, and Ashley Borough in particular, face numerous challenges. A few of them include:

- Unemployment is regularly higher than the state and national average
- Household incomes are lower than the state and national average
- An aging population
- Aging infrastructure
- High school-property taxes
- Aging housing stock with low property values
- Fragmentation of local government has resulted in more costly delivery of basic governmental services



Photo Credit: undergroundminers.com

These challenges are not uncommon among municipalities in older industrial states and can be overcome with careful planning, vision, and strong leadership.

Opportunities

Ashley has numerous potential economic drivers that have yet to be tapped to their full potential. Three major economic drivers for the Borough and Northeastern Pennsylvania are:

- 1) Their proximity to markets
- 2) The regional presence of numerous institutions of higher learning
- 3) The presence of several major hospitals serving the area.



Photo Credit: pennsnortheast.com

From Main Street in Ashley Borough, one can reach 60% of the population of North America in less than 8 hours by car or truck. The ability for a business of any size to get their product to potential customers in a quick and cost-effective manner is critical. This market proximity offers great opportunities for companies in the warehousing, manufacturing, and technology industries.

Additionally, the shifting national mood toward embracing trade policies which favor the interest of domestic manufacturing over offering cheap goods to consumers could bode well for “Rust Belt” states like Pennsylvania. There is also a very strong “Buy Local” and “Buy American” resurgence in the United States which will increase the demand for locally sourced products. Ashley Borough and Northeastern Pennsylvania have long been known for the strong work ethic of their residents. Manufacturers looking to add a facility would find an affordable, hardworking, and eager labor pool ready to fill these jobs.

Access to low cost energy could help too. While much of the Natural Gas exploration in Pennsylvania is west of Luzerne County, the projected uptick in this industry and the associated availability of an inexpensive energy source, could encourage companies to locate here. Most manufacturing companies are high energy users, and companies in the plastics and chemical industry directly rely on natural gas for production. Northeastern Pennsylvania’s proximity to highways, railroads, and ports; coupled with its accessibility to low-cost natural gas, would make it an ideal manufacturing hub.

In addition to potential growth in manufacturing, the region can begin to attract technology industry jobs as well. For the first time in history many companies are moving to where the talent is, as opposed to making the talent move to them. Modern technology has enabled firms to open satellite locations to better access a balanced talent pool. The Borough is within a few miles of Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, King’s College, McCann School of Business & Technology, Misericordia University, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, and Wilkes University. These schools offer degrees in various areas of study including technology and traditional liberal arts programs. Matched with a lower cost of labor in comparison with more urban areas, this makes Northeastern Pennsylvania an attractive place for new or expanding companies to locate.

Regions cannot succeed economically without a strong health care system. Hospitals not only provide much needed health care services, they provide family sustaining jobs to residents. Ashley Borough is

fortunate to be served by several top-notch health systems: Commonwealth Health, Geisinger Health, and Lehigh Valley Health Network. All have hospitals within a reasonable distance of the Borough. Competition among these providers will increase the level of care made available to patients, as well as increasing the pay of health care professionals in order to attract the best medical talent. This will have a very positive effect for Ashley and Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Threats

In 2015 Pennsylvania ranked 5th among all US States for drug overdose rates. This statistic by itself is alarming, but the news gets worse. According to a July 2017 study by the DEA and The University of Pittsburg, Luzerne County ranks 13th among Pennsylvania's 67 counties for the highest death by overdose rates.

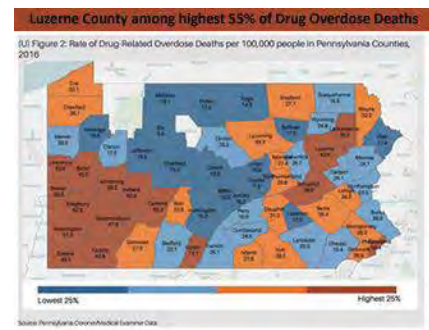


Photo Credit: Dave Scherbenko / for The Citizens' Voice

There is some debate about the direct link between the current opioid epidemic and it's influence on petty and violent crime, although common sense dictates a correlation.

However there is no debate that providing a community with a sense of pride and purpose, with attractive homes, meaningful work, restorative play and hope in the potential for good lives for ordinary working people and their families, diminishes both crime and drug abuse.

Advisory Committee Points of Discussion

This is a summary of points made during the Ashley Borough Advisory Committee discussions.

Mainstreet

Most stakeholders agreed that Ashley Borough's downtown is a top priority for development.

Ashley's "Main Street," or North Main Street, extends south from the City of Wilkes-Barre at Hazle Street and goes south until it intersects Rutz Street. The primary focus of downtown redevelopment should occur between the intersections of Cemetery Street / South Main Street and Mary Street / North Main Street.



Many members of the committee shared memories that Main Street used to be vibrant. Stakeholders agreed that North and South Main Street are troubled by dilapidated buildings, unappealing facades and vacant store fronts. Remarks detailed peeling paint, poor sidewalks, little or no curbing, deficient parking, inadequate lighting and visible power lines. (Although one member reminded us that visible power lines were a charming indication that power was in good supply)

Stakeholders explained that stores and restaurants were limited and that the only bank recently left. Stakeholders expressed a desire for streetscaping and clean, new signage at borough gateways.

Huber-Breaker

Huber-Breaker was resoundingly the group's predominant concern. The group expressed a strong conviction that other efforts would be to no avail unless the issues surrounding the Breaker were resolved, due especially to the Breaker's visible and prominent location at The Borough's south-west gateway. The possibility that significant remediation costs, might be involved in the development loomed as a daunting hurdle to progress. Stakeholders noted that the site made Ashley less attractive to both homeowners and business investors.



Photo Credit: Melanie Mizenko for Times Leader

Housing Stock

The Committee flagged Ashley's housing stock as another primary concern. Members described aging houses built during the coal era. They affirmed local homeowners as being responsible citizens who care for their properties but pointed out that Ashley's elderly population is often challenged by the maintenance costs of these older homes, given their fixed incomes. They also expressed concern that when older residents pass, surviving family members might be more likely to use the properties as rentals, given



Photo Credit: Google Earth

Ashley's declining property values and current image. The Advisory Committee agreed that homeowners were more likely to invest in and maintain properties than landlords and renters, noting commendable exceptions. Several members expressed a desire for their children and grandchildren to be able to stay in Ashley, and hoped that more modern housing and better employment opportunities would facilitate this.

Image

Correspondingly the thought was expressed that outsiders see Ashley as a “dirty, old coal town” devoid of opportunity. Members asserted that Ashley is in fact a wonderful place to live in and raise a family, and wished they could communicate that message convincingly to young families, professionals and affluent retirees.



Photo Credit: Fine Art America

Recreational Opportunities

The Advisory Committee also discussed Ashley’s parks, identifying Miners` Memorial Park at the Huber Breaker site; Ashely Municipal Park, just off of South Main Street; and a baseball facility bordering Conyingham Street. Members described the baseball area as the most heavily used, but explained that with the exception of Miners’ Park, the other parks are in in poor or adequate shape.



Stakeholders expressed a desire for more recreational opportunities that people of different ages would be interested in, such as walking paths and biking trails.

Group members also drew attention to Ashley’s Memorial Day Parade, one of the oldest in the country, and felt it offered a great tool for inciting positive interest in the community, which would be in keeping with the goals of Ashley’s desired new image.

Crime

Stakeholders described Ashley as a place where you used to be able to keep your doors unlocked. They noted that crime in The Borough was not as high as that of neighboring Wilkes-Barre, but were troubled by an uptick in nuisance crimes and petty theft. Some expressed worry that Wilkes-Barre's crime might trickle in to Ashley.



Members also voiced concern about Miners' Medical, the new drug addiction treatment center on South Main Street, while others acknowledged that they knew friends and family members who might be helped by the facility. Appropriate speculation ensued about the relationship between rising crime in The Borough and rising drug use.

All of the stakeholders agreed that Ashley would benefit from a more visible police force and active neighborhood crime watch. Stakeholders also liked the idea of having officers walk to bus stops in the morning to establish relationships with the children in the community.

Ashley Vision 2020 Plan Overview

In order to rebuild a community, planners must first clearly identify and rank the priority issues. Following are Ashley Borough's six highest priorities for building momentum, initiating revitalization, and making substantial progress towards the borough's goals for future prosperity.

Mainstreet

Priority Issue #1: Main Street Needs a Face Lift.

Ashley's Main Street lacks an identity and features an aging housing stock and dated commercial structures.



Ashley Borough Council should consider the following:

- ✓ Creation of a façade improvement program, matched by state funds when possible, which offers incentives to property owners willing to make improvements which are consistent with specifications which will be laid out in an ordinance passed by Council.
- ✓ Prioritize streetscape improvements starting on South Main Street near the Huber Breaker Historical Site and continuing to North Main Street up to the Wilkes-Barre border. Consideration should also be given to moving the powerlines underground. The Borough should retain an engineer to design, provide cost estimates and “phase out” this plan. Possible funding sources may include; DCED Multimodal Transportation Fund, PennDOT Multimodal Transportation Fund, PennDOT Transportation Alternatives Fund, Local Share Account and soon to be announced federal infrastructure funding.
- ✓ Issuing an RFP seeking development options for the former Borough Building. Depending on the nature of the RFP, possible funding incentives could be offered for development. A large vacant structure on the Main Street of any town sends a bad sign to possible investors. For the time being, development at this location could be a center piece of the Renaissance of Ashley.

- ✓ Consider entering into discussions with CVS and Dunkin Donuts about adding possible locations on Main Street.
- ✓ Consider using the Tax Increment Financing Act (TIF) to fund development opportunities on Main Street.

Huber Breaker

Priority Issue #2: The Huber Breaker Site Needs to Be Repurposed

The Huber Breaker was once a point of pride for the Borough of Ashley. It provided employment opportunities and helped to fuel the Industrial Revolution and two World Wars. Today it stands as a reminder of a bygone era and is an albatross around the neck of progress. .



Ashley Borough Council should consider the following:

- ✓ Pursuing funding to provide an assessment of the environmental condition of the property.
- ✓ Pursuing funding to clean up any environmental issues connected to the site.
- ✓ Pursuing developers who would have an interest in repurposing the site in a manner that is consistent with the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy of Ashley Borough

Housing Stock

Priority Issue #3 Ashley Needs New Housing Stock.

Ashley was a town built to service the coal industry. Many of the housing units in the Borough are aging and in need of repair.

Ashley is a wonderful place to live. It has relatively low property taxes, a reasonable cost of living, and a full-time police force.

What it needs is low maintenance, high quality housing. By utilizing programs and tools such as the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) and TIF, private developers may be willing to work with the Borough to create market rate housing (i.e. no income restriction) for working people.



Ashley Borough Council should consider the following:

- ✓ Implementation of a rental to home owner conversion program which offers incentives to property owners willing to convert a property to a single-family dwelling.
- ✓ Implementation of a rental ordinance which ensures that rental properties within the Borough are safe, clean, and up to code. This ordinance should take special care to protect renters and property owners.
- ✓ Pursuit of funding to clean-up the former Huber Breaker site and partnering with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to provide development incentives to whoever owns the site. This would be a prime location for a mixed-use development which could include market rate housing, multi-generational recreational opportunities, and small specialized retail stores.

Identity / Brand

Priority Issue #4: Ashley Borough Needs a New Identity.



Ashley should be proud of its role in providing the energy needed to fuel the industrial revolution and win two world wars. Ashley needs to honor its proud past, while planning for its promising future. In order for a municipality to succeed it must understand and create a plan to respond to trends.

Two important trends that offer opportunity for Ashley Borough are the recent job gains in Hanover Township and the increasing crime and property taxes in the City of Wilkes-Barre. These two municipalities are the “bookends” of the Borough.

The job creation in Hanover Township will create a need for quality market rate housing near the Township’s Industrial Park; it will also increase traffic counts on Main Street. The perception of increasing crime and property taxes in Wilkes-Barre will cause working-class homeowners to flee the city in pursuit of safer and more affordable housing.

Ashley is landlocked and does not have an industrial park. While there are many opportunities for the creation of small and mid-sized service and technology related businesses, most of the major job creation in other sectors is likely to occur in neighboring municipalities. With this understanding, Ashley should focus on creating a more livable community.

If Ashley is marketed as “The Place To Live” it could enjoy an increase in demand for homes. With an increasing population, service sector businesses will begin to pop up as well. This will increase current property values and support the proposed development suggestions listed above.

Ashley Borough Council should consider the following:

- ✓ Consider passing a resolution changing the Borough's motto to "Ashley, The Place to Live in Luzerne County" or something following this theme.
- ✓ Issue an RFP for the creation of a new Borough logo, website, and Facebook page.
- ✓ Purchase new entrance signage with this new logo and motto.

Parks & Recreation Program

Priority Issue #5: Ashley Borough Needs to Enhance its Parks and Recreation Program.

With the recent addition of Miners' Memorial Park, the Borough of Ashley now has three parks in its inventory. Having a strong parks program is one of the key indicators of a strong community.

Investments in parks have been demonstrated to significantly increase the attractiveness of a community to potential homeowners and business investors.



Ashley Borough Council should consider the following:

- ✓ Authorizing the completion of a Parks Master Plan (could be covered by MAP funding) to be completed in 2018 which will consider the best uses of the three parks individually and potential connectivity options which could include bike and pedestrian options. There are grant programs available through the Commonwealth Financing Authority, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and even PennDOT which could help to fund suggested projects.

Crime & Drugs

Priority Issue #6: Ashley Needs to Be a Leader In Fighting Crime and Drugs.

Safe streets are critical to the success of a municipality. The Ashley Borough Police is lucky to be led by an experienced Chief. It is important to provide the Department with the tools that they need to keep the streets safe from violent crime and drugs.



Ashley Borough Council should consider the following:

- ✓ Authorizing a “walk and talk program” which would encourage officers to spend a part of their shift getting to know the people and business owners in the Borough.
- ✓ Authorizing Penn Strategies (under our current contract) to conduct an equipment needs assessment to identify any equipment needs of the Ashley Borough Police Department. After completing this assessment, we can apply for federal grants through the Department of Justice, and Department of Homeland Security.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION



Photo Credit: Carlos Muza on Unsplash

An analysis of the economic development potential of Ashley Borough would not be complete without considering the present condition of Luzerne County and the region in general.

ASHLEY’S MSA

Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA’s) are geographic areas used by federal agencies to collect, tabulate, and publish key statistics about a region. Ashley Borough is part of the Scranton / Wilkes-Barre MSA, sometimes also referred to as the Scranton-Wilkes-Barre-Hazleton, PA Metro Area. There are 18 MSA’s in Pennsylvania and 382 in the United States. The Scranton / Wilkes-Barre MSA is the the 5th largest (in population) in Pennsylvania and the 99th largest in the country.

Geography

The Scranton / Wilkes-Barre MSA contains 1,776 miles² encompassing Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties. Of that area, 29.5² miles are water, and the remaining land. This area, also referred to as Pennsylvania’s Coal Region, is where the Allegheny Plateau meets the Ridge and Valley Province.

According to the Köppen Climate Classification, this MSA is subtype Dfb meaning it has a “Warm Summer Continental Climate” in which forests thrive. It’s biomes include temperate woodlands; grasslands; deciduous, evergreen and coniferous forests marked by fall foliage in autumn. Above average rainfall and an average annual temperature of 49.2°F, contribute to the diversity of its woodlands. These factors converge to offer the delightful combination of mountains, valleys, forests, streams and lakes sought after by outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers.



Demography

Following are statistics of economic interest about Scranton / Wilkes-Barre MSA residents, taken from various sources, according to the most recent year of available data

Population

The Scranton / Wilkes-Barre MSA has a combined population of 558,166 people. While the population of this area has suffered a slight decline, an interesting and promising detail is the increasing number of international migrants. During the 5 year period referenced below, 4,632 citizens left the MSA and 6,270 foreign residents joined it.

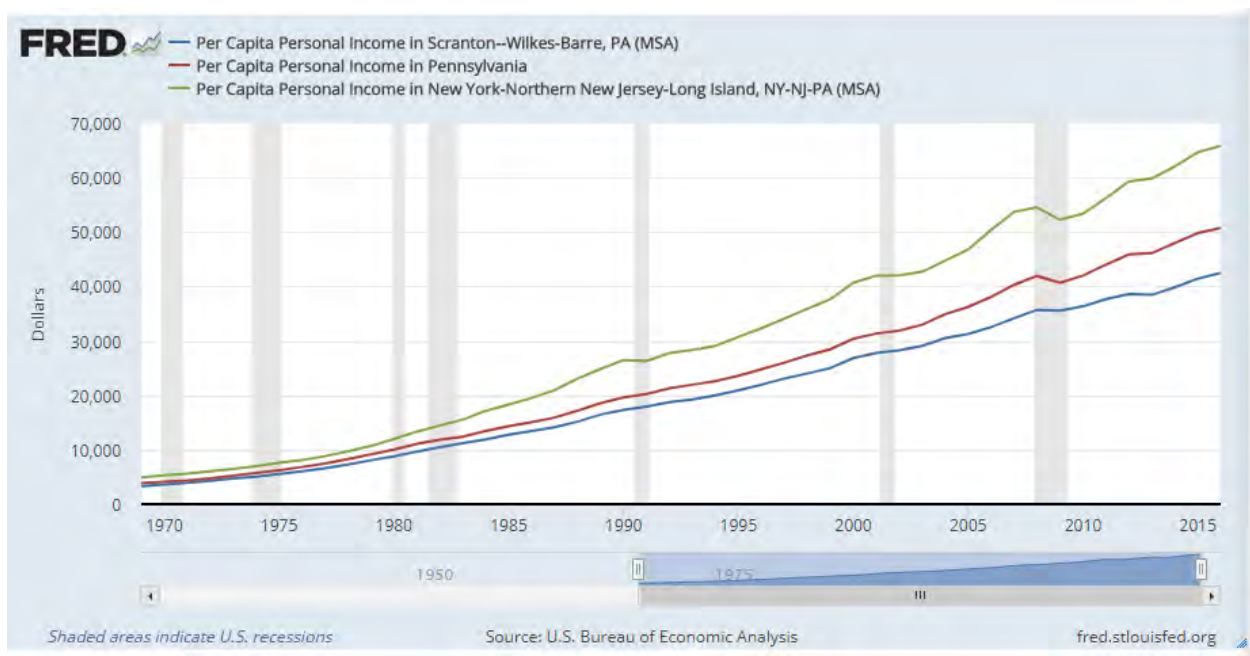
Population Change Between 2010 and 2015 for Wilkes-Barre / Scranton MSA								
Population	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Change	% Change
Lackawanna County, PA	214,509	214,581	214,477	213,759	212,561	211,917	-2,592	-1.21
Luzerne County, PA	320,998	321,153	321,493	320,041	319,337	318,449	-2,549	-0.79
Wyoming County, PA	28,236	28,296	28,358	28,139	28,143	27,800	-436	-1.54
Total	563,743	564,030	564,328	561,939	560,041	558,166	-5,577	-0.99

Source: Developed by ProximityOne based on Census Bureau and other data

Income

The Median Household income in The United States is \$57,230. It is \$55,702 in Pennsylvania and \$49,670 in the Scranton / Wilkes-Barre MSA. While it's clear that the median household income in Ashley Borough's MSA is lower, the historical and per capita data is more telling.

Below is a graph depicting the per capita personal income for the NY-NJ-PA MSA, for the state of Pennsylvania and for the Scranton / Wilkes-Barre MSA. Note the degree of divergence continuing to widen post the early 80's when changes in the manufacturing industry had a significant impact on communities in this region.

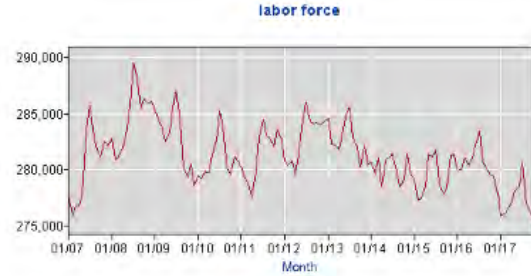


Another note about the per capita data is that it is more meaningful when extrapolated. Ashley's MSA had a per capita personal income (PCPI) of \$42,488 in 2016, versus the national average of \$49,246. When multiplied by the population for the MSA, this \$6,758 difference results in a difference of almost \$3.8 billion within the community at large.

Employment

The Bureau of Labor Statistics calculates six measures of unemployment, U1 through U6, that measure different aspects of unemployment. U3, the official unemployment rate, is defined as the percentage of unemployed people who are “currently in the labor force” as opposed to those who simply want a full or part-time job, or a better job. U6, is an alternate measure which includes “discouraged workers,” the “underemployed” and the “marginally attached.”

As of October 2017, the national unemployment rate (U3) was 4.1 %, and 4.7 % in the Wilkes-Barre / Scranton MSA. Some sources estimate that the calculation for U6 roughly doubles these percentages.

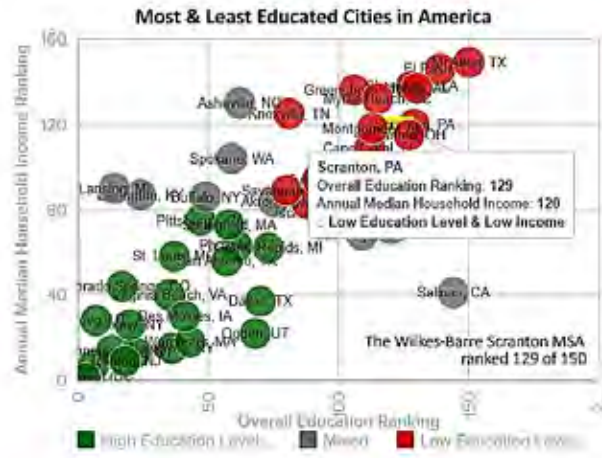


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

The charts (above right) show that the MSA has both a declining labor force and unemployment rate (U3), and a growing employment rate. Given these facts and other employment data for this area, such as a poverty rate of 15.2%, it is possible that the Wilkes-Barre / Scranton MSA has an elevated or disproportionate percentage of U6 unemployment.

Education

According to The Economic Policy Institute, "A Well-Educated Workforce is Key to State Prosperity." The EPI suggests that a key component in strengthening a local economy is to attract well-paying employers, both by investing in education and by increasing the appeal of their cities to college graduates.

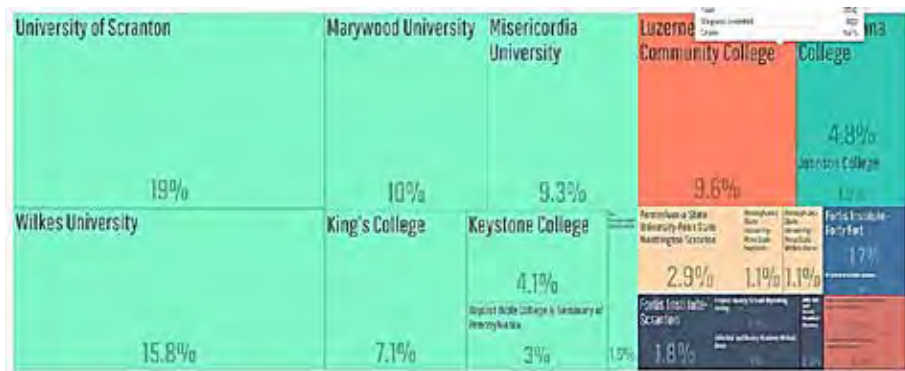


Source: Richie Bernardo for WalletHub

In a study performed by WalletHub, analysts compared the 150 largest metropolitan statistical areas, or MSAs, across nine key metrics, including percentage of college graduates and quality of the public-school system, to determine which MSAs ranked highest in education. The Wilkes-Barre Scranton metro area ranked 129th of 150.

On a positive note, the Department of Education lists 22 colleges, universities and technical institutes in The Scranton / Wilkes-Barre MSA. The top three in terms of number of graduates are The University of Scranton, Wilkes University and Marywood University. Notably, the metro has a significantly high number of students who earn a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Science, almost 2.5 times higher than the national average.

Municipal improvements combined with this region's existing advantages can give these graduates a reason to look for, or create, local employment opportunities.



Source: DataUSA

Homes

According to The American Planning Association, “In order for communities to function, there must be an adequate supply of housing in proximity to employment, public transportation, and community facilities, such as public schools. The housing stock must include affordable units, both for sale and rent, not only to meet social equity goals, but in order to ensure community viability.”

The Wilkes-Barre Scranton MSA fulfills some of these conditions beautifully. In fact, in a 2017 survey rating International Middle-Income Housing Affordability by Performance Urban Planning, the MSA ranked in the top ten most affordable places to live in the *world*, and the 2nd most affordable in Pennsylvania.

SCHEDULE 3 ALL HOUSING MARKETS RANKED BY AFFORDABILITY: Most Affordable to Least Affordable Median Multiple (Median House Price/Median Household Income): 2016 – 3 rd Quarter <i>Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey</i>							
International Affordability Rank	Major Market Rank	National Rank	Nation	Housing market	Median Multiple*	Median Price	Median Household Income
1		1	U.S.	Racine, WI	1.8	\$104,000	\$58,400
2		2	U.S.	Bay City, MI	1.9	\$91,000	\$47,500
3		3	U.S.	Decatur, IL	2.0	\$99,400	\$49,100
3		3	U.S.	Elmira, NY	2.0	\$109,400	\$54,200
5		5	U.S.	East Stroudsburg, PA	2.1	\$123,000	\$58,500
5		1	Australia	Karratha, WA	2.1	\$363,000	\$171,900
5		5	U.S.	Lima, OH	2.1	\$110,000	\$51,400
5		1	Canada	Moncton, NB	2.1	\$134,900	\$65,200
5		5	U.S.	Peoria, IL	2.1	\$123,100	\$57,500
5		5	U.S.	Rockford, IL	2.1	\$111,900	\$52,100
5		5	U.S.	Scranton-Wilkes Barre, PA	2.1	\$109,000	\$50,700
5		5	U.S.	Springfield, OH	2.1	\$102,000	\$49,000
5		5	U.S.	Terre Haute, IN	2.1	\$88,000	\$41,800
5		5	U.S.	Youngstown, OH-PA	2.1	\$90,300	\$44,000
15		13	U.S.	Binghamton, NY	2.2	\$111,900	\$50,400
15		2	Canada	Fredencton, NB	2.2	\$151,000	\$68,800
15		13	U.S.	Utica, NY	2.2	\$110,000	\$50,000
18		15	U.S.	Cumberland, MD-WV	2.3	\$94,400	\$40,200
18		15	U.S.	Davenport, IA-IL	2.3	\$128,700	\$56,700
18		1	Ireland	Limerick	2.3	€128,300	€55,900
18		2	Australia	Port Hedland, WA	2.3	\$390,000	\$168,700
18		15	U.S.	Saginaw, MI	2.3	\$100,000	\$44,300
18		15	U.S.	Springfield, IL	2.3	\$135,800	\$59,100

Source: Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey: 2017

Families

Regions and cities have a cultural identity which can have an important impact on their economies. Some regions are regarded for their creativity, ethnic or religious concentrations, or suitability for raising a family. The following statistics are offered in this interest as they bear on the cultural identity of the Wilkes-Barre / Scranton MSA.

Households

220,572

Number of households

Pennsylvania: 4,937,771

United States: 118,860,065

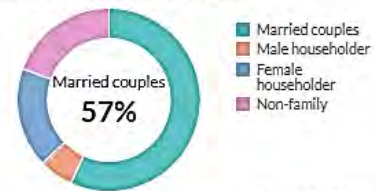
2.4

Persons per household

a little less than the figure in Pennsylvania: 2.5

about 90 percent of the figure in United States: 2.7

Population by household type



Show data / Embed

Age

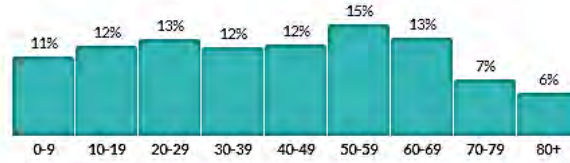
42.7

Median age

a little higher than the figure in Pennsylvania: 40.6

about 10 percent higher than the figure in United States: 37.9

Population by age range



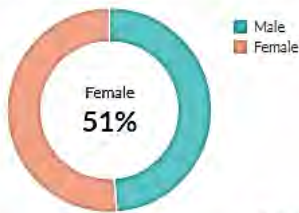
Show data / Embed

Population by age category



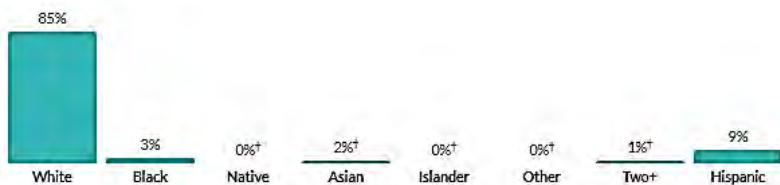
Show data / Embed

Sex



Show data / Embed

Race & Ethnicity



* Hispanic includes respondents of any race. Other categories are non-Hispanic.

Show data / Embed

Source: Data USA

A few of the remarkable characteristics about the current cultural makeup of this community are:

- 8.9 % of the population has veteran status, about 20% higher than the national average
- 59.27% of the MSA is affiliated with a religion; 43.77% of the population is Catholic
- The percentage of “single with children” households is 12.72% higher than the national average.

These are predominantly female head of household families.

Crime

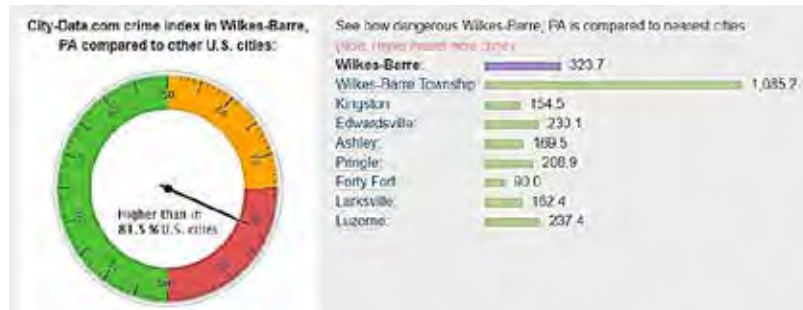
Numerous studies have suggested a strong correlation between an area's crime rate and its levels of education, unemployment and poverty. According to a March 2017 study by Gary Gerson, Pennsylvania spends the sixth most of all states on K-12 education, but has an unemployment rate which is the seventh worst in the country. He notes however that "statewide averages do not necessarily hold true at the city level."

The chart below shows Pennsylvania's most dangerous areas, taking into consideration crime, police presence and community socioeconomic factors:



Source: Gary E. Gerson

This data was compiled from The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program which is a nationwide, cooperative statistical effort of nearly 18,000 law enforcement agencies, who voluntarily report data. Notably



Source: City-Data

Wilkes-Barre did not participate in this program in 2015, however City-Data calculates Wilkes-Barre's using a 13 year average, as 81.5% higher than in the average for US Cities, shown above.

Luzerne County

In addition to the Scranton / Wilkes-Barre MSA, an overview of Luzerne County needs to be included in this study as well, to help analyze the economic state of Ashley Borough in the context of its county.

In some ways the conditions in Luzerne County mirror those of its MSA, but in this and the following section, will we pull out individual components of interest, that are relevant to understanding Ashley Borough's challenges and assets.

Geography

Luzerne County has a total area of 906 square miles; 890 miles² of land and 16 miles² of water, meaning that it has more water than the other two counties in its MSA combined. Luzerne also boasts the highest and lowest elevations of the three counties, with Cherry Ridge offering a lofty view of Lake Jean.



Harvey's Lake, Luzerne County

Most of Ricketts Glen is part of Luzerne county, a State Park which the DCNR has included in its list of "25 Must-See Pennsylvania State Parks." Ricketts Glenn has been designated a National Natural Landmark because of its outstanding biological and geological resources, illustrative character, rarity, diversity, and value to science and education.



Ricketts Glenn State Park

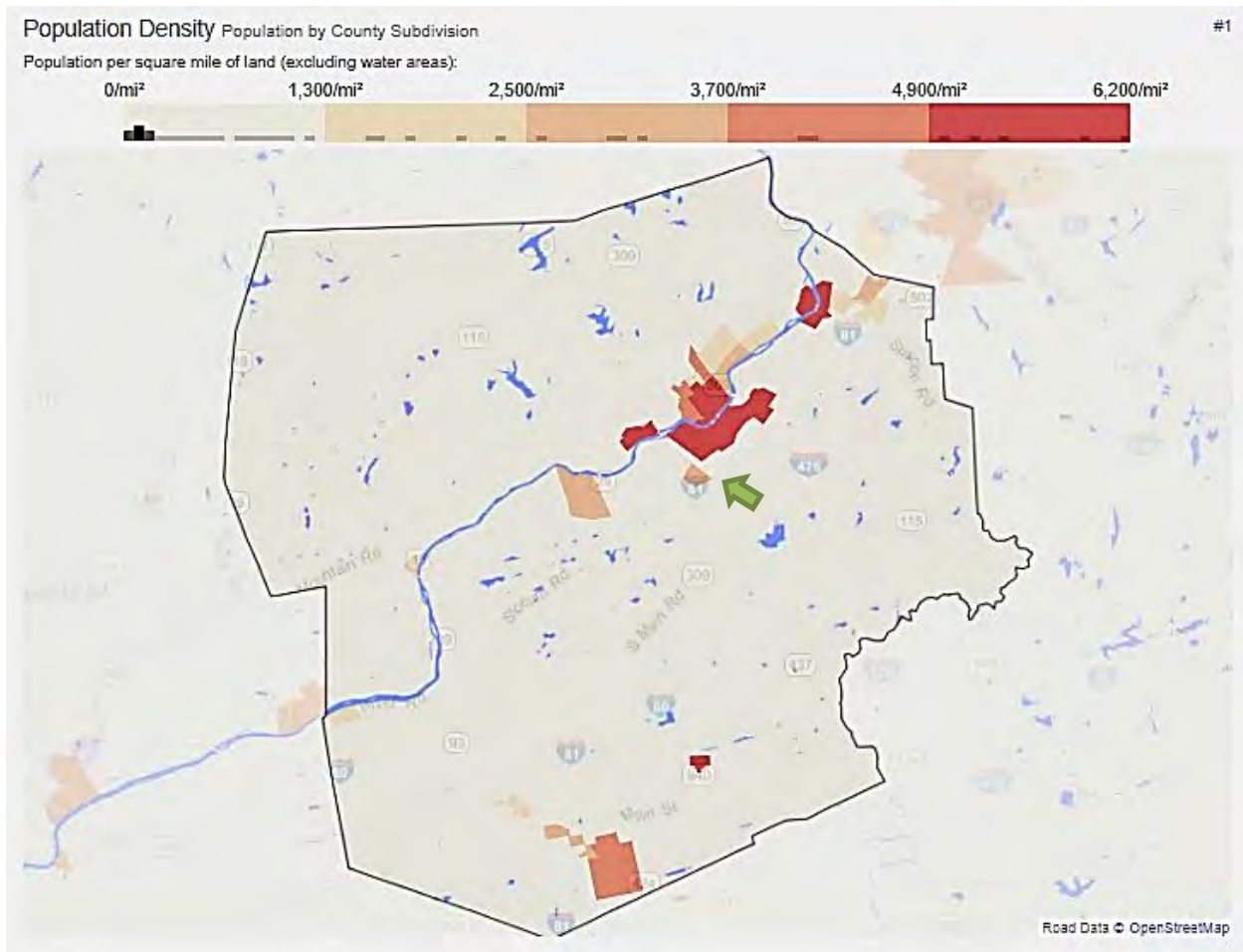
Demography

Following are statistics of economic interest about Luzerne County residents, taken from various sources, according to the most recent year of available data

Population

Luzerne County has a population of 316,383, according to the US Census Bureau information for 2016. It is the 12th largest county in Pennsylvania by population and contains 76 independently governing municipalities, including 4 cities, 36 boroughs, and 36 townships. The largest of these, by population, are Wilkes-Barre, Hazleton and Kingston.

Below, a population density map shows the concentrations of Luzerne's population relative to Ashley Borough.



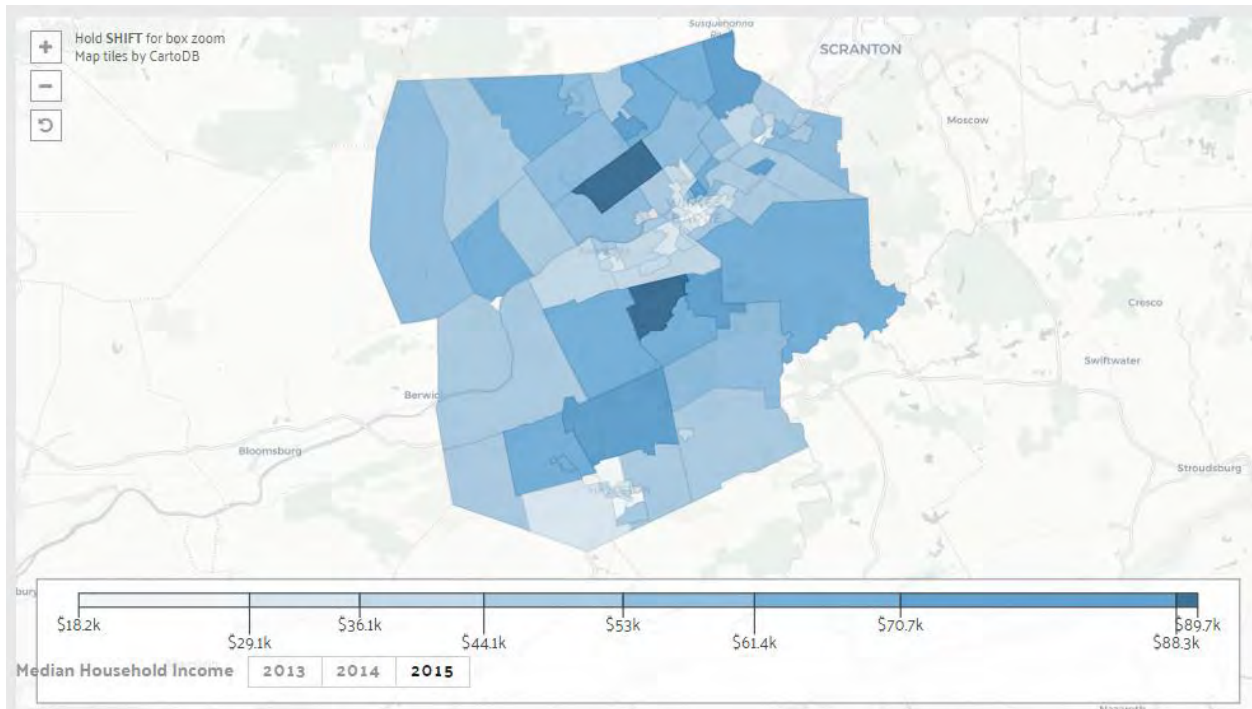
Source: Statistical Atlas

Ashley's centrality to the county's population hub may offer opportunities for consolidation of services.

Income

In 2015, the median household income for Luzerne County, PA was \$50,301, again lower than the US and Pennsylvania averages, but as expected, higher than the MSA's average, due to the concentrated population of Wilkes-Barre.

The map below shows the distribution of these median incomes by census tract:



Source: Data USA

One note of interest is that when analyzing income by race and ethnicity classifications, Asian workers made 1.21 times more than white workers, the second most highly paid group.

Considering the factors we have already discussed, this perhaps discomfoting statistic may actually be a good harbinger for Luzerne County, indicating that Luzerne County's affordability and other merits are already beginning to attract the more highly skilled workers that will be a component in this area's turnaround.

Employment

The US census calculates that in 2017 there are 7,182 employer establishments in Luzerne County.

The County's Top Employers are as follows:

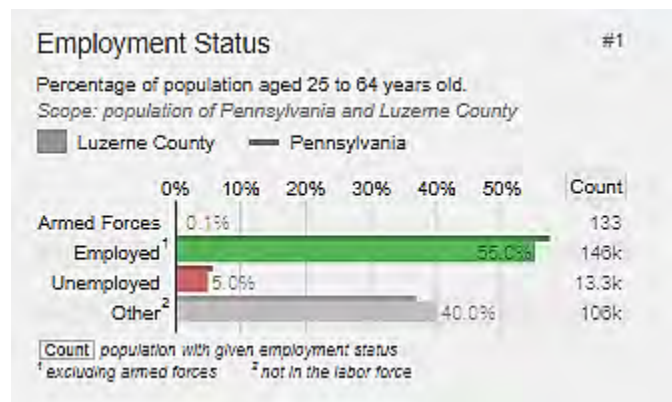
1. Federal Government
2. State Government
3. Amazon.com DEDC LLC
4. Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center
5. Wilkes-Barre Hospital Company LLC
6. NBC Pittston Merchants Inc
7. Luzerne County Government
8. Hazleton Area School District
9. Wal-Mart Associates Inc
10. Lowe's Home Centers LLC



Geisinger Kistler Clinic

Additionally, the census lists 16,739 nonemployer establishments. A nonemployer business is defined as one that has no paid employees, has annual business receipts of \$1,000 or more (\$1 or more in the construction industries), and is subject to federal income taxes. The ratio of Nonemployer to Employer Establishments in Luzerne County is over 2:1.

The Employment Status chart (right) magnifies different data along the same theme. 40% of Luzerne County's populace is considered neither employed nor unemployed, but are counted as "not in the labor force" or U6.



Source: Statistical Atlas

In the previous section on the MSA's Employment statistics, we suggested the possibility that there might be a greater prevalence of U6 unemployment in The Wilkes-Barre Scranton MSA. This data above neither confirms this suggestion, nor is it necessarily bad news.

According to a 2015 U.S. Government Accountability Office report, this statistic is *not* particular to Luzerne County. Nationally 40.4% of all American workers belong to the category of “contingent workers” – an increase of just under 10% since 2005.

Elaine Pofeldt, in a March 2015 Forbes article, describes some of the workers included in this data-set:

- Independent contractors who provide a product or service and find their own customers (12.9%)
- Standard part-time workers (16.2%)
- Self-employed workers such as shop and restaurant owners, etc. (3.3%)

If you haven’t heard the phrase before, the increasing prevalence of nonemployer establishments and growth in U6 unemployment is characteristic of “The Gig Economy.”

By definition The Gig Economy is a labor market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs. It is a national phenomenon, born of myriad factors including, but not limited to, availability of suitable employment and technology advances that facilitate the advantages of remote work.

The significance of this to Ashley Borough, is that people such as information workers and software developers, can now live *anywhere*, and use technology to access remote employment or make their own jobs in areas with affordable housing, access to major markets and desirable lifestyle conditions.

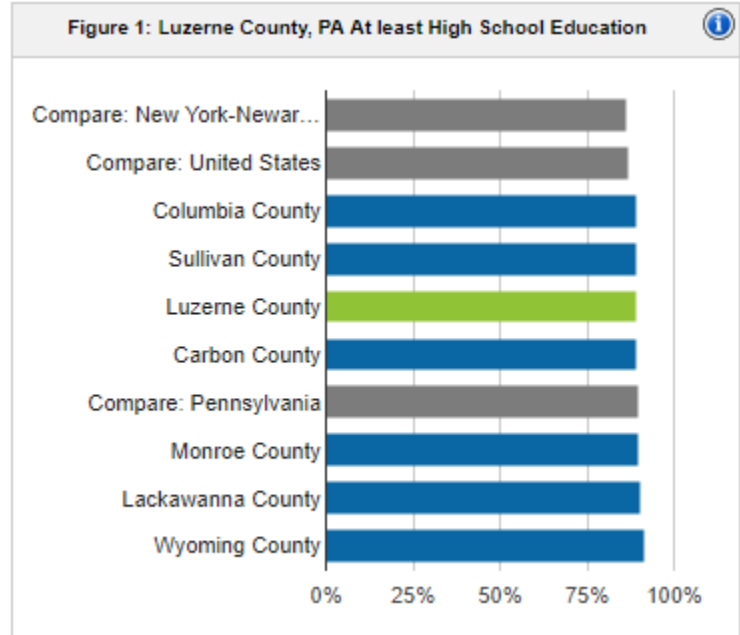


Source: Grant Reinero / Business News Daily

Education

There are 63 public K-12 schools in Luzerne County, serving 40,412 students, with a student : teacher ratio of 16:1. According to the 2017 American Community Survey data, these schools are achieving some important successes.

Luzerne County is outperforming the US average for high-school graduates by 2%, and trails the state average by only 1%. This shows growth in the right direction for Luzerne County's future.



Source: Town Charts

Luzerne County has also been proactive about improving career readiness for K12 students, preparing them to succeed in postsecondary education and their careers, by beginning the process of implementing Comprehensive Career Development Education (CDE). The CDE Program, developed by The Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development, is expected to help guide and direct more students to technical schools, apprentice programs, certificates, community college, or four year colleges/universities.

Finally, Luzerne County K-12 schools score well in diversity, a quality which is prized by many parents evaluating school systems when considering relocation. Luzerne County, PA public schools have a diversity score of 0.26, which is higher than the Pennsylvania average of 0.25. Minority enrollment (chiefly Hispanic) is 27%.

Homes

In 2015, there were 148,206 housing units in Luzerne County. The region's housing stock is principally older.

In Luzerne County the median year built was 1954, compared with 1961 for the State of Pennsylvania and 1976 for the United States.

While updating and preserving housing stock is generally an important consideration in community development, it's also good to remember that older homes can be an asset. Homes built between 1890 and 1940, before World War II, are affectionately referred to as "Pre-War" and are coveted by buyers who value their charm. A quick search on Zillow yields

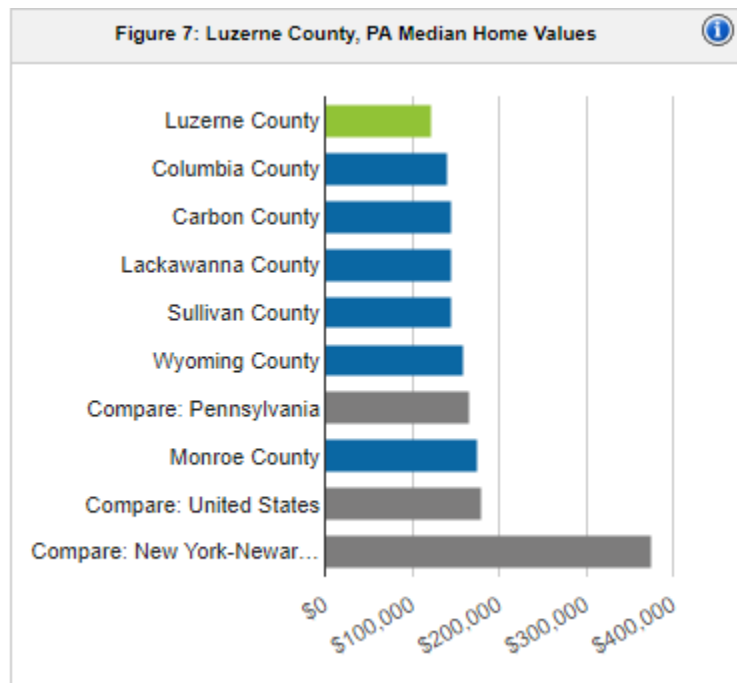
282 Pre-War single-family homes for sale in Luzerne County.

Of the total number of housing units, 87% are occupied. This is comparable to State and Federal rates of 89% and 88% respectively.

Finally, like its MSA, Luzerne County tops the affordability list with median home values at \$122,700, versus the State's \$166,000 and the nation's \$178,600.



1936 Luzerne County Home
Source: Zillow



Source: Town Charts

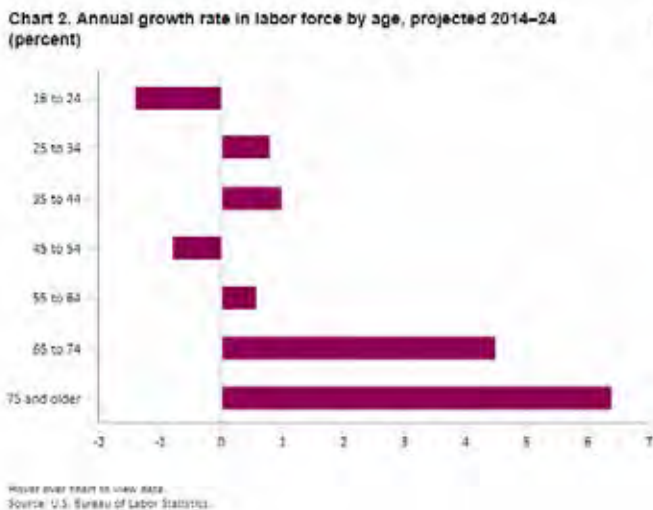
According to a 2016 report by RTI International, "Affordability of housing and the general cost of living is an important quality of life indicator that companies and individuals consider when they choose to move to or stay in an area. Affordable housing is important to economic diversification and optimization because housing availability for various income levels increases the ability of businesses to recruit employees and retain them in the local region. In fact, high housing costs are associated with out-migration. For these reasons, affordable housing can enhance economic sustainability."

Families

Luzerne County has a higher percentage of residents in their 50’s, 60’s and 70s. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), by 2020, approximately 25 percent of the workforce will be age 55 or older. The BLS further elucidates that the labor force participation rate is “expected to increase fastest for the oldest segments of the population—most notably, people ages 65 to 74 and 75+—through 2024.”

AGE	Luzerne County	MSA	PA	US
Median Age	43.0	43.0	40.6	37.7
<20	22.3%	23%	24.0%	25.8%
20s	12.8%	13%	13.4%	14.0%
30s	11.4%	11%	11.9%	13.0%
40s	13.1%	13%	12.9%	13.1%
50s	14.7%	15%	14.7%	13.7%
60s	12.5%	13%	11.7%	10.7%
70+	13.1%	13%	11.5%	9.7%

Source: 2017 American Community Survey



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Peter Cappelli, professor of management at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, says, “If you look at data on older individuals’ job performance and abilities, they get mind-blowingly better with age, especially in areas increasingly key to success, like interpersonal skills and teamwork.” Capelli is not alone in his regard for the mature worker.

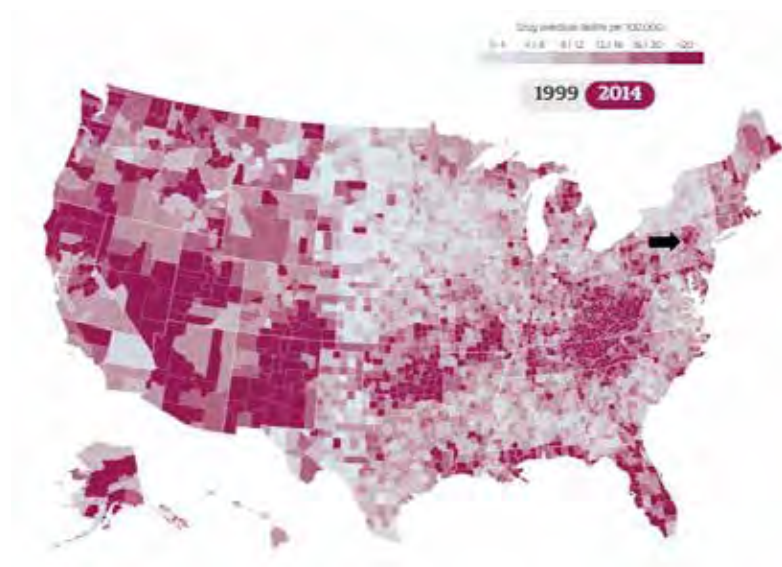
Lewis Lustman, in a May 2017 article entitled, The Surprising Benefits of Hiring Older Talent calls 60, “the new 40” and points out that “some jobs require cognitive skills that actually improve with age.” One study includes skills such as technical writing and human resources management among those skills better performed by older workers, so this statistic positions Luzerne County well for economic improvement.

Crime

According to the Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting System (UCR) the top three crimes in Luzerne County by frequency for 2017 were Property Offenses, Assaults and Drug Violations.

Luzerne County 2017	Offenses	% of Total	Solved	% Solved
Criminal Homicide	15	0.1%	12	80.00%
Sex Related Offenses	251	1.9%	112	44.62%
Robbery	160	1.2%	60	37.50%
Assaults	1,986	15.4%	1,431	72.05%
Property Offenses	6,891	53.3%	1,604	23.28%
Arson	44	0.3%	6	13.64%
Drug Violations	1,804	13.9%	1,142	63.30%
Other Alcohol Crimes	1,786	13.8%	1,398	78.28%
Totals	12,937	100.0%	5,765	45%

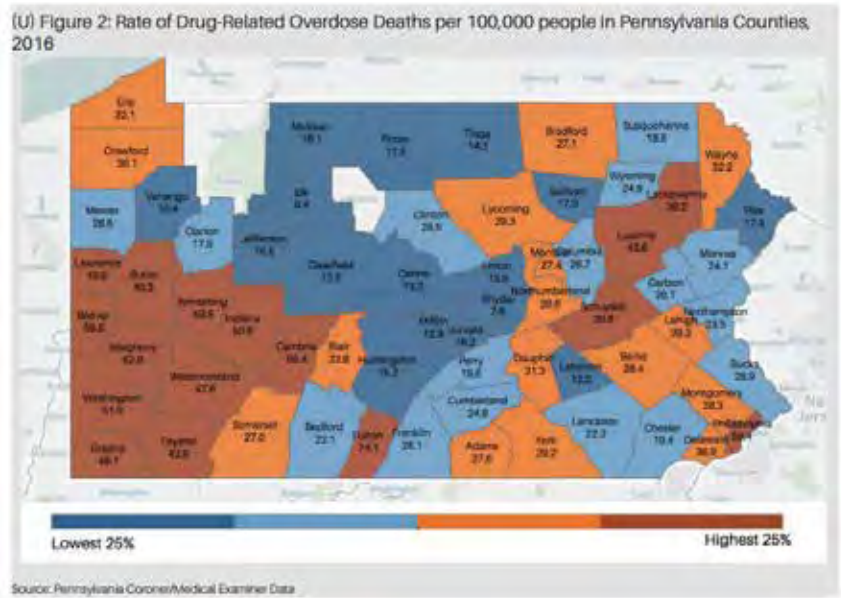
While this data doesn't highlight Drug Violations as the predominant crime concern in Luzerne County, national and regional data suggest that the subject warrants attention. According to the National Institute of Justice, 60 percent of individuals arrested for most types of crimes test positive for illicit drugs at arrest. Furthermore, a 2004 DOJ study found that 17-18 percent of prisoners and inmates said they committed their current offense to obtain money for drugs.



Infographic Credit: Nadja Popovich / for The Guardian

The map shown left is from a 2014 article by Nadja Popovich for The Guardian on America's Drug Overdose Epidemic which currently claims more lives than gun fatalities or car crashes. The map highlights overdose deaths exceeding 20 per 100k in dark purple, as those areas most affected in the country. The black arrow points to Luzerne County, unfortunately vividly demarcated.

Another map, right, shows drug-related overdose deaths by prevalence among Pennsylvania counties, again with both Luzerne and Lackawanna among the highest 25%.



Source: Pennsylvania Coroner / Medical Examiner Data

According to the DEA, Fentanyl is the chief culprit in Luzerne’s overdose deaths.



Credit: Allison Bond for Stat

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid analgesic that is similar to morphine but is 50 to 100 times more potent. The image to the left shows fatal doses of heroin and fentanyl side by side.

Of the 1,804 Luzerne County Drug Violations detailed by the UCR, 29% were for Drug Sale and Manufacturing, and 71% for Drug Possession.

The National Safety Council stresses the importance of community involvement in overcoming this epidemic. They advocate strategies including establishing Addiction Support Groups, Narcan training for Police Officers and MedDrop boxes, which are making a difference.

The Luzerne County Drug and Alcohol program offers free Narcan Training. A weekly addiction informational meeting called “Let's Find Solutions” is available at the Nesbitt Medical Arts Building.

Ashley Borough

In many instances what is true of The Wilkes-Barre / Scranton MSA and Luzerne County, is true of Ashley itself. In this section we will continue to explore points and subtleties about the community that further illuminate the path to Ashley Borough’s promising future.



Source: Google Earth

Geography

Ashley is located at 41°12'51"N, 75°53'58"W, sharing its latitude line with Ogden, Utah and Bari, Italy; and a longitude line with Virginia Beach and Lima, Peru. The 2.3 km² Borough is all land, and intersected by two creeks – Solomon’s Creek and Sugar Notch Run.

Trulia Hazard Maps indicate that several small sections in the north and south-western area of The Borough have high and moderate risk of flooding, and the entire Borough is in a zone of moderate risk from Accumulated Tornado Energy.



Source: Trulia Maps

Hanover Township encircles Ashley along with two other boroughs – Sugar Notch and Warrior Run, which are 2 and 3 miles respectively to Ashley’s south-west.

Google suggests a 10 minute drivetime to Wilkes-Barre, just over an hour to Allentown, less than 2 hours to Harrisburg or Philadelphia, and 2.5 hours to Manhattan.

Source: Trulia

Demography

Following are statistics of economic interest about Ashley Borough residents, taken from various sources, according to the most recent year of available data

Population

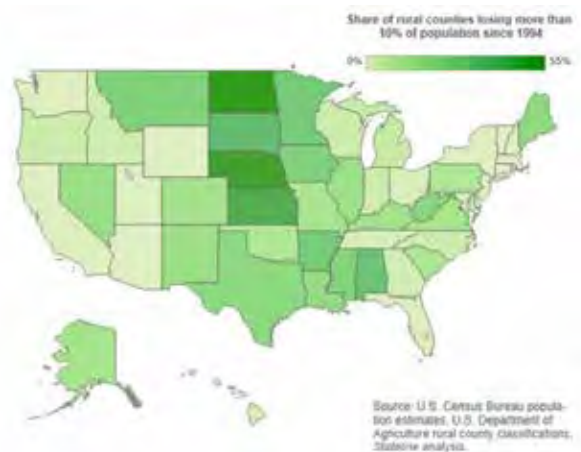
The US Census Bureau estimates the 2016 Population of Ashley Borough at 2,705. This number reflects a continued population decline, as has been the case since the 1940 census and forward.

Ashley Borough Population Variance

Year	Population	Growth / Decline
1880	2,799	--
1890	3,192	14.0%
1900	4,046	26.8%
1910	5,601	38.4%
1920	6,520	16.4%
1930	7,093	8.8%
1940	6,371	-10.2%
1950	5,243	-17.7%
1960	4,258	-18.8%
1970	4,095	-3.8%
1980	3,512	-14.2%
1990	3,291	-6.3%
2000	2,866	-12.9%
2010	2,790	-2.7%

Source: US Census

According to a 2015 Governing Magazine article, Ashley is not alone in this difficulty. Tim Henderson writes, “Population loss is a long-term trend in much of rural America, and it’s gotten more acute since 2010, according to a Stateline analysis. Although 759 rural counties in 42 states lost population between 1994 and 2010, more than 1,300 rural counties in 46 states have lost population since 2010.”

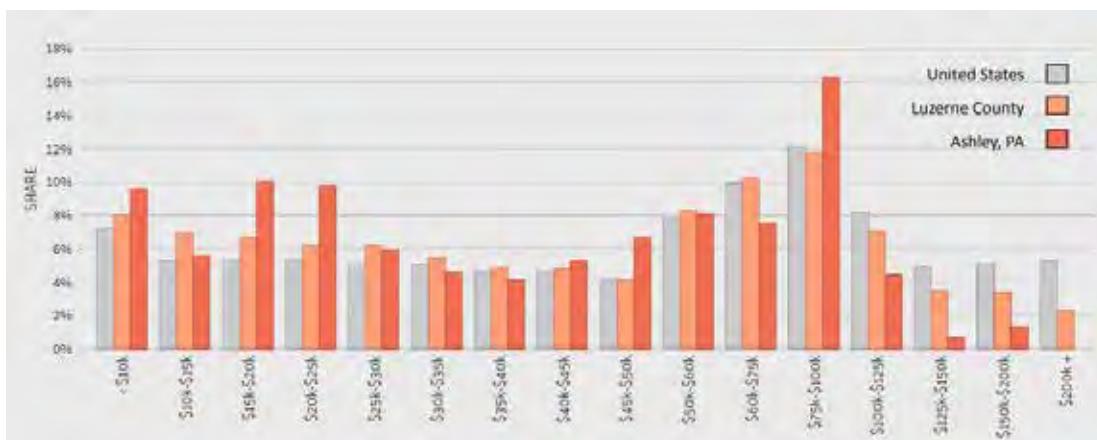


Source: Tim Henderson for Governing Magazine

Common strategies for responding to population decline include reducing costs by sharing services and cutting back, and increasing revenues by attracting new residents. The latter is accomplished by emphasizing and enhancing the city’s existing assets and resources, and developing a community brand with strong and appealing points of differentiation.

Income

According to Data USA, the median household income for Ashley Borough in 2015 was \$40,347. Comparatively, this is \$9,954 lower than Luzerne County’s median household income of \$50,301 for the same year. These numbers reflect a 1.29% decrease for Ashley and a 13.5% growth for Luzerne.



Source: Data USA 2015

A 2016 publication by the EPA entitled, Framework for Creating Smart Growth: A Tool for Small Cities and Towns, suggests trying different and creative methods, including promoting entrepreneurship as a strategy for increasing household incomes and reestablishing a healthy tax base. Given the MSA’s employment statistics, this may be a workable solution for Ashley Borough.

The publication suggests, “Encouraging entrepreneurs to start businesses gives people power over their own lives and lets them build wealth in their own communities. Business owners who also live in the community tend to spend more on local business services and keep more of their earnings in the local economy. They also have a vested interest in the community and are less likely to move elsewhere in response to incentives offered by other cities.

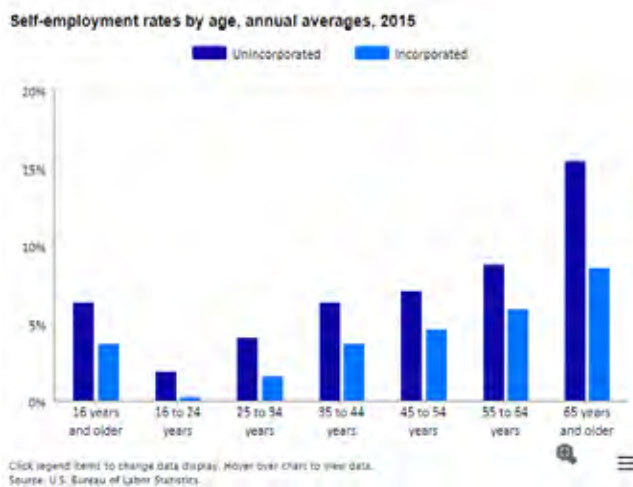
Employment

According to Data USA, in 2015 Ashley Borough's population included 2,248 people aged 16+. Of those 1,297 or 58%, had jobs according to the U3 standard.

As discussed previously, that 58% would *not* include workers in non-employer establishments such as sole proprietors -- a sector which increased nationally between 2011 and 2015 by over 1.8 million.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

The Bureau of Labor Statistics calculates that self-employment is more common among older workers, veterans and foreign-born workers.

The Small Business Assistance Network (SBAN), an outreach of The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, provides budding entrepreneurs the necessary resources to start and grow a small business in Pennsylvania.

Ashley residents who prefer more traditional employment and wish to find a job or a better one, may receive free services including career counseling and training through PA CareerLink in Wilkes-Barre. Indeed, a free online job site, currently lists 2,006 jobs available within a 10 mile radius of Ashley, with salary estimates between 20 and 45K. The available jobs are described as Full-time (1434); Part-time (421); Commission (68); Temporary (37); Contract (35); and Internship (11). Another online service, Flexjobs, helps applicants find remote work for a modest fee.

Education

Ashley Borough is in the Hanover Area School District. The Hanover Area School District, is comprised of Hanover Township, and the boroughs of Warrior Run, Sugar Notch and Ashley. The School District encompasses approximately 30 square miles. The district consists of the Junior/Senior High School (grades 7-12), Memorial Elementary (grades 4-6), Lee Park Elementary (grades 2-3), and Hanover Green Elementary (grades K-1). The High School is fully accredited by the Middle States Association.



Hanover Area students score above the national average on standardized achievement tests and have demonstrated their accomplishments in the Pennsylvania Junior Academy of Science (PJAS), the Voice of Democracy Contest, National History Day, Mock Trial, and Youth Salute. Approximately 73% of HASD graduates seek higher education.



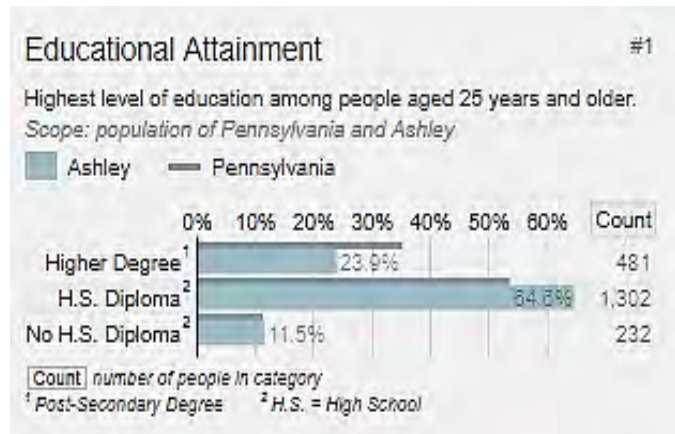
*Penn State University Student Lloud Huck
Photo Credit: Alan Wycheck / Getty Images*

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, “between fall 2004 and fall 2014, the percentage increase in the number of students enrolled in degree-granting institutions was higher for students under age 25 than for older students; however, the rate of increase is expected to be lower for students under age 25 than for older students in the coming years. The enrollment of students under age 25 increased

by 18 percent from 2004 to 2014, while the enrollment of those age 25 and over increased by 16 percent. From 2014 to 2025, however, NCES projects the increase for students under age 25 to be 13 percent, compared with 18 percent for students age 25 and over.”

A 2014 NBC news article entitled Back to School: Older Students on the Rise in College Classrooms reiterates this, citing that “In 2009, students aged 25 and older accounted for roughly 40 percent of all college and graduate students. That figure is expected to rise to 43 percent by 2020 as 9.6 million older students head to campus.”

Currently according to Statistical Atlas, Ashley residents have a higher than average rate of high-school graduation, but a lower than average rate of post-secondary education.

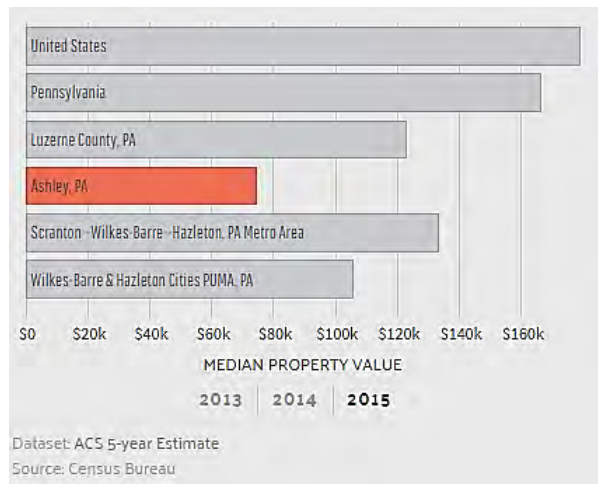


Source: Statistical Atlas

But given the national trends for older Americans in both the labor market and in educational participation, and the success of The Hanover School District, The Borough of Ashley can hope to improve these levels in both it’s younger and older population.

Homes

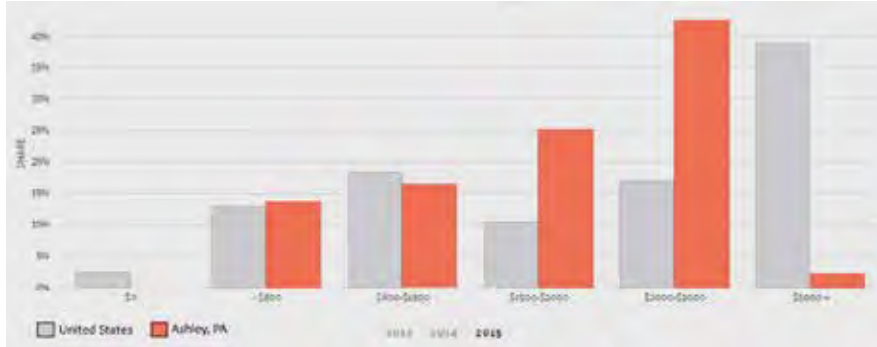
According to Data USA, the median value of a property in Ashley, PA was \$74,600 in 2015, a decrease of \$300 under the previous year’s values of \$74,900.



Source: Data USA

The chart left compares Ashley’s affordability to other local and national regions. Remembering that Ashley’s MSA was found to be one of the most affordable places to live in *the world*, consider how much more this is true of Ashley Borough.

Furthermore, Ashley has plenty of room to make housing improvements to increase the appeal of these homes, while yet remaining a most affordable and accessible residential community, with superlative quality of life factors.



The average amount of property taxes in Ashley are in the 2-3 thousand-dollar range.

Finally, 76% of housing units in Ashley are owner-occupied, which is higher than the national average of 63.9%. Regarding the remaining 24%, according to The Center for Community Progress, “a stock of sound, well-managed single-family rental properties can be a valuable asset for a community.” Because Ashley’s housing supply has a wide margin for growth while yet remaining affordable, establishing standards for these units is one step The Borough could take to improve housing options within the community.

A publication called Raising the Bar: A Short Guide to Landlord Incentives and Rental Property Regulation by Alan Mallach, provides a guide to municipalities seeking to reward responsible landlords, while focusing enforcement on chronic offenders.



44 Barnes Street, Ashley - 2 Bedrooms, 750 sqft, \$675/mo
Source: Trulia

Families

According to the American Community Survey for 2016, there are 1,162 households in Ashley, with 2.3 persons per household, just under the average of 2.4 for the MSA. Ashley residents are less likely to be married (13% less likely than in Luzerne County and 16% less likely than in Pennsylvania) and more likely to live with non-family members. The median age is 42.9, just over the median age for the MSA of 42.7. It is a mostly white community, with 16.9% living below the poverty line, of which 25% are children and 10% are seniors.

Households

1,162

Number of households

Luzerne County: 127,514

Pennsylvania: 4,961,929

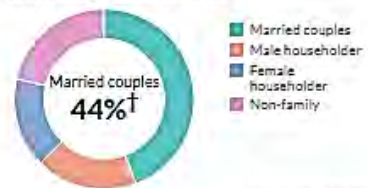
2.3

Persons per household

a little less than the figure in Luzerne County: 2.4

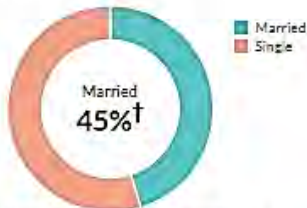
about 90 percent of the figure in Pennsylvania: 2.5

Population by household type



Show data / Embed

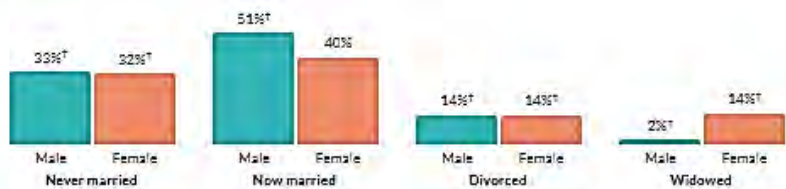
Marital status



* Universe: Population 15 years and over

Show data / Embed

Marital status, by sex



Show data / Embed

Fertility

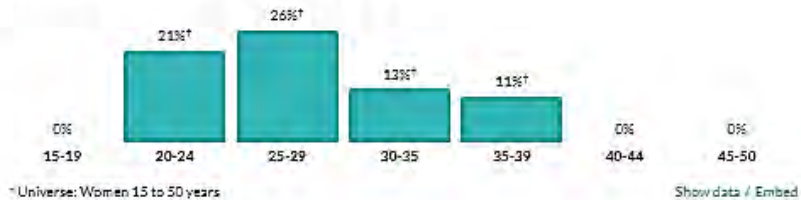
9.9%

Women 15-50 who gave birth during past year

about double the rate in Luzerne County: 5% †

about double the rate in Pennsylvania: 5%

Women who gave birth during past year, by age group



* Universe: Women 15 to 50 years

Show data / Embed

Ashley’s affordability has made it an amenable place to start a family, with 9.9% of its female residents between 15 and 50 giving birth within the last year, double the rates of Luzerne County, Pennsylvania and the US.

Crime

According to the Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting System (UCR) the top three crimes in Ashley Borough by frequency for 2017 were Property Offenses, Drug Violations and “Other Alcohol Crimes” for which a UCR Offense definition is unlisted.

Ashley Borough 2017	Offenses	% of Total	Solved	% Solved
Criminal Homicide	0	0.0%	0	80.00%
Sex Related Offenses	0	0.0%	0	44.62%
Robbery	1	1.3%	1	37.50%
Assaults	9	11.5%	4	72.05%
Property Offenses	38	48.7%	7	23.28%
Arson	0	0.0%	0	13.64%
Drug Violations	16	20.5%	3	63.30%
Other Alcohol Crimes	14	17.9%	4	78.28%
Totals	78	100.0%	19	24%

Property Offenses ranked high in both Luzerne County and Ashley, vis à vis this data and per Ashley residents.

The National Institute of Justice, defines Property Crime as taking money or property when there is no force or threat of force against the victims. This includes burglary, motor vehicle theft, property or larceny theft and vandalism. Arson is typically categorized as a property crime, although the presence of a separate line item for arson in the record above, suggests it is *not* included in the 38 violations listed.

The Institute has catalogued Programs and Practices used to combat Property Crime on a site called crimesolutions.gov, rating each method with evidence ratings that support it’s effectiveness. The Practices listed include Neighborhood Watches, Improved Streetlighting and Hot-Spots Policing along with other interesting strategies.

CONCLUSION



Photo Credit: Glenn Carstens-Peters on Unsplash

Ashley 2020

In a paper entitled [Coalition Building: One Path to Empowered Communities](#), the author quotes Leonard Duhl's description of a healthy community as one "that is continually creating and improving those physical and social environments, and expanding those community resources, which enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life, and developing to their maximum potential."

A mutually supportive community facilitating growth toward maximum potential in our families, in our health, in our careers and economy, and in our lasting impact – this is the goal we have for Ashley. It is of course a high ideal. It is true that Ashley's challenges are real, and like all challenges, may at times seem overwhelming.

But other similar communities have leapt the hurdles that now stand between Ashley and the good of her citizens. In the coming months and years we will draw from their examples. We will garner the

support of Luzerne County, The State of Pennsylvania, The United States itself as well as the coalition of Ashley's own residents as we, Penn Strategies join you in the dream of Ashley 2020.