

Urban expert David Rusk recently spoke to a packed house of community leaders at the York Expo Center about steps he thinks need to be taken to rejuvenate York City and prevent the decline of its suburbs. Following is his summary for York and our observations for Lancaster:

York	Lancaster
<p>Secure special legislation from the General Assembly to endow the York County Board of Commissioners with the authority to designate Central York municipalities as a "community of common interest." (Such a bill might be proposed as a state pilot project as a model for inter-governmental collaboration.)</p>	<p>A voluntary effort is the place to start such a program in Lancaster County.</p> <p>The LIMC's new <i>Growing Together</i> regional comprehensive plan envisions a similar form of voluntary intergovernmental cooperation for the City of Lancaster and its neighboring boroughs and townships.</p>
<p>As part of this "community of common interest," (cci) have the county board of commissioners designate York City's historic neighborhoods as a "regional asset district" for which a regional tax base sharing program would be developed to share the increase in property tax revenues as the neighborhoods would be redeveloped.(York City would be allocated a sufficient share to cover the costs of providing basic municipal services.)</p>	<p>The LIMC plan is the place to start this in Lancaster County. Any effort to identify the city as a "cci" should come from the cooperating municipalities.</p> <p>Most of downtown Lancaster is designated in the historic asset district.</p>
<p>Have the county and all participating municipalities implement a regional "fair share" workforce housing plan. Reducing the concentration of low-income families will accelerate private market interest in redeveloping historic properties for new, higher-income residents. It will also allow city families to move into suburban areas where a) retail and service jobs are growing, and b) where high-performance, low-poverty schools are.</p>	<p>In 2006, the Lancaster County Commissioners formally adopted <i>Choices</i>, the housing element of the County's comprehensive plan. <i>Choices</i> is intended to address the affordability, availability and distribution of housing across the county. All of the ideas for York expressed by Rusk are contained in at least one of the elements of the Lancaster County plan.</p> <p>LCPC is cooperating with several stakeholder groups in the formation of a housing coalition. Over time, the Coalition will take up advocacy of many of the critical housing crisis solutions.</p> <p><i>Growing Together</i> also addresses many of the same issues for the LIMC region.</p>
<p>Have the York County Chamber of Commerce or other business organization launch two marketing campaigns - a regional campaign to attract</p>	<p>The new downtown homeownership initiative, <i>Lancaster Living</i> has similar goals.</p>

<p>Timonium-Hunt Valley professionals to Old York City and a national campaign to promote Old York City as an emerging center of the design professions.</p>	<p>Lancaster County is already attracting professionals from Chester Co. to live.</p> <p>Lancaster Arts, First Friday, and “The Edge of the East” are good examples.</p>
<p>In order to attract child-rearing professional families to Old York City, organize a regional elementary school with an enriched curriculum and full work-day schedule (8 a.m. to 6 p.m.). Set the enrollment policy as 1) no more than half the pupils to be enrolled from the historic neighborhoods, and 2) at least half the pupils to be children of downtown York office workers or employees of other major York City employers, such as York Hospital and York College <i>regardless of where they live in other municipalities in Central York.</i> Such a school will likely be very attractive to workers who otherwise face "latchkey" problems with their young children. This will create a city-based elementary school with a much more economically balanced enrollment that will be attractive to new families considering buying renovated historic homes.</p>	<p>This idea could be pursued for Lancaster if the interest is there.</p>
<p>Extend the regional school program by allowing graduates of the school to attend any middle school or high school in Central York.</p>	<p>Would this be something for Lancaster to consider?</p>
<p>Secure special state funds as part of the pilot project legislation to cover the special costs of the regional school program.</p>	<p>Would this be something for Lancaster to consider?</p>
<p>If many municipalities decline to participate voluntarily (which is likely), the special state law should empower the county government to hold a special election to approve or reject the plan. All voters living in the "community of common interest" would vote as a single box; the voters of a given municipality could not just opt out. If the plan is approved by a majority of voters of the "community of common interest," the plan would go into effect in all covered municipalities.</p>	<p><i>Growing Together</i> has the potential to accomplish many of Mr. Rusk’s ideas on a voluntary basis and perhaps without the controversy of a special election.</p>