

## **Housing, poverty remain top concerns in Lancaster city**

*Building On Strength Panel Discussion Summary, June 21, 2018*

July marks the third year of Lancaster city's implementation of the "Building on Strength" economic development strategic plan intended to guide city growth for 10 to 15 years.

It is important to keep the plan fresh and front of mind for our team, community and partner organizations that work together to fulfill its recommendations.

The "Building on Strength" plan works to ensure Lancaster city has a long-term economic development strategy to promote increased investment and a high quality of life throughout the city.

As we approached the plan's three-year mark, we had the opportunity to reconnect with the nationally recognized consultant team that assisted in designing the plan. Their observations about Lancaster, its progress, areas for improvement and ability to move the plan forward has provided us a valuable resource.

We should be proud as a community that many of the plan's recommendations are underway. However, it is not possible to implement them without the strong partnerships we have across the city and county.

These partnerships stood out as exceptional to the consultants. They noted the ability of Lancaster's nonprofits, businesses, government, education, philanthropy and health care groups collaborating in a way that is unique across the country.

They were impressed with the community's ability to tackle the tough conversations and move the plan forward. It should be noted, however, that challenges remain.

The consultants recommended we continue to think broadly around transportation, urging the community to identify ways that we can effectively move people around the city and county using alternate choices of transportation.

Doing so will allow a city resident to more effectively commute to a high- quality, living-wage job in the region. And it will allow visitors to better experience all of what Lancaster has to offer, encouraging them to stay longer and spend more money.

The consultants urged us to continue working together, innovate and recognize the long-term potential that effective transportation can have for our entire community.

Another challenge to address is to make a more deliberate focus on some of the plan's harder recommendations. This includes addressing poverty and the high cost of housing.

These issues are not unique to Lancaster, but it is something we are poised to tackle and serve as a model for the rest of the nation.

The consultants were encouraged that the city's economic development plan and poverty coalition's "One Good Job" report intentionally work together. Partnerships developed to assist entrepreneurs and workforce development were also highlighted as, increasingly, Lancaster has become a national model for collaboration.

The entire community received praise for our accomplishments in the first three years of the plan and was credited for caring about what is best for Lancaster.

However, workforce development, transportation, poverty and affordable housing must continue to be addressed. Lancaster is up to the challenge.