

March 1, 2019

For Immediate Release: 78/22 Coalition (Hunterdon County Economic Development)

New Effort Builds Municipal Partnerships Along 78 Corridor in Hunterdon County

A new initiative in Hunterdon County is aimed at promoting its central corridors as a prime location for business.

The 78/22 Coalition, an effort lead by Hunterdon County Economic Development, formed in 2018 in response to a recent increase from brokers and others in developing projects along the two corridors. The member communities' goals are to jointly vet these opportunities, work together to address growth, and to begin to work more collaboratively across a wide-range of issues.

"This committee is the first successful county effort to work collaboratively with all the towns along these two routes that are so crucial to the future viability of Hunterdon," stated Freeholder Director Suzanne Lagay. "The best economic development is collaborative economic development"

Hunterdon municipalities represented in the Coalition include Bloomsbury, Bethlehem, Union, Clinton, Clinton Township, Franklin, Lebanon Borough, and Readington.

As some of its initial goals, the group will be working to promote the two corridors as prime locations for tech and entrepreneurial growth, seeking to leverage the presence along I-78 of corporate giants such as ExxonMobil and UNICOM Global, which recently purchased and occupied the over 900-acre former Merck Headquarters in Readington Township.

"The presence of companies like ExxonMobil, whose R&D facility here holds hundreds of research laboratories, speaks very strongly to the skill level of our local workforce. This same workforce can support a wide array of industries requiring the ready availability of an educated workforce to reach their full potential," commented Coalition Member John Higgins, Mayor of Clinton Township.

Aside from a talented workforce, town officials believe they can also successfully leverage their proximity to New York City, Philadelphia, and the growing Lehigh Valley to attract companies, in addition to factors such as affordable land and office space versus other New Jersey locales, beautiful surroundings, and the willingness of town and county officials to work closely with companies to support their endeavors.

"Businesses bringing forward projects that are reasonable and appropriate for Hunterdon will find town officials willing to accommodate their efforts," stated Town of Clinton Mayor Janice Kovach.

According to Hunterdon County Economic Development, the county and towns are finalizing their priorities for the next few years but that, already on the list, will be a 2019 website launch which will include an interactive corridor map for detailed exploration of participating communities. Additionally, the towns will be creating an advocacy agenda for addressing larger issues with state officials such as transportation, and will be considering research such as a targeted industry study, aimed at site specific evaluations of ‘highest and best use’ for the corridors’ available properties and stranded assets.

“We are determined to maintain a vibrant economy here for years to come so that our young folks can grow their lives and careers locally and, so we can continue to attract top talent to Hunterdon,” said Paul Muir, Mayor of Bethlehem Township. “A pro-active and cooperative effort such as this Coalition is a huge part of doing just that.”

The 78/22 Coalition meets monthly in the town of Clinton. Questions about the effort, or about business relocation to or expansion in Hunterdon, can be directed to Marc Saluk at Hunterdon County Economic Development at 908-399-1108 or at msaluk@co.hunterdon.nj.us