

Why Invest in Wilkes-Barre?

Two projects underway in Downtown Wilkes-Barre — the downtown theater complex and the River Commons development — have been criticized in months. The comments focus on wasted dollars in a city that will never again be vibrant.

We respectfully disagree with this line of thinking. Wilkes-Barre has significant potential and we believe these two projects should be viewed with pride. Community revitalization and community sustainability come from investment. In this case, local government, county government, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and our local chamber of commerce are investing in our downtown. They have become developers of last resort. These two developments pave the way for new investment from the private sector. Developers and new businesses aren't going to invest in a community when the community doesn't care enough to invest in itself.

Growth and prosperity come from new investment. We can already see real estate transactions occurring in downtown involving individuals and developers, both locally and from out of the area, as a result of what has been started.

One need only take a look at how Pasadena and San Diego have transformed themselves in the past 10 years. Other communities, such as San Antonio, Fayetteville, Akron, Denver, and Detroit, have reinvested in themselves and reinvented themselves, and have created more jobs and improved the overall quality of life.

Wilkes-Barre and surrounding communities have many strong attributes that we often take for granted. There is an appealing quality of life; there are many amenities; the cost of living is affordable; and we have proximity to major markets. We have limited traffic congestion, clean air, and a strong higher education infrastructure.

There is no denying that many things are broken and need to be fixed. However, we need to begin somewhere. Many success stories begin with the public sector paving the path toward investment and creating projects involving the arts, culture, recreation, and venues. These types of projects help to develop a community's image and restore its pride. The tie to economic development is simple.

Companies want to locate where their employees want to live! Business owners know their employees are more productive if they are happy, if they can afford to purchase a home, have their children attend good schools, and have options regarding recreation, shopping, dining, and cultural activities.

We tend to forget that this community deteriorated over time, and it will take time to repair and rebuild it. We also tend to take for granted the positives of our region by minimizing their importance while focusing on the negative. Image and pride are developed by being informed and involved.

It is time to work for and support positive change, rather than remain negative, complacent, and uninvolved.

JUSC is a research-based think tank founded by Wilkes University, in partnership with College Misericordia, King's College, Luzerne County Community College, Penn State/Wilkes-Barre, and the University of Scranton. JUSC was formed to educate, strategize, and convene on urban renewal, community, and economic development.

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