

## Testimony of Edward Manning

Introduction and About Me: My wife, Wendy, and I moved to Shamokin in the Summer of 2020 from Berks County. I am a native of Reading, PA and Wendy is from Boyertown, PA

I am an Entrepreneur (6 Businesses), Real Estate Investor and Developer and actively involved in the Re-Vitalization Efforts of Shamokin and the Surrounding Region. I have served as Chairman of the Shamokin Area Economic Development Authority since September 2020.

Our business ventures include; Oliver's - Cocktail & Cigar Lounge, Heritage Restaurant, Pinnacle Energy Solutions (an Energy Management & Procurement Consulting Firm), a Leasing Company (focused on our own needs at present) and some Rental Real Estate Entities as well as a Couple of Air BnB's = Short-Term Rentals in both Pottsville and Shamokin.

I like to think of us as Leaders in the Efforts to Revitalize the Greater Shamokin Region.

Blight: Blight comes in many forms and discussions could be had on any one component. However, the most crucial and pressing aspect involves Vacant and Deteriorating Real Estate. Blight is the Big Hurdle that stands in the way of Revitalization Efforts and the ability for Communities to Catapult forward with Economic Development Goals.

I do not think that it can be argued that Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs are the Economic Engine that not sustains, but drives growth, development and prosperity in any community.

So, I believe the focus should be on that component. The target needs to be the Central Business Districts of and Gateways into Communities, Towns, Cities, etc. This drives Economic Growth, Creates Jobs, Fosters Commerce and as a result increases Tax Revenue.

The primary problems and concerns, as I see it, center around Understanding and Enforcement of Codes, Zoning and Planning. There are a multitude of funding options to remove or demolish blighted properties, do EPA testing, Grants for Facade Improvement, Mega-Grants for Development, etc. But the primary needs are in addressing Vacant and Pre-Blighted Properties in our C.B.D.'s and Gateways. The complaints or "push-backs" always involve lack of understanding of the tools, rules, codes, ordinances, laws, etc. and the Personnel to effectuate enforcement. The communities dealing with these problems simply do not have the appropriate funds available to properly hire and staff Zoning and Codes Offices. Therefore, the problems persist with not enough "man-power" to properly and effectively handle them.

If State and Federal Authorities want to assist — Funding Sources need to become available to properly staff these offices. And also regular and proper education of the tools that are available to address these problems.

The last component are laws that prohibit the local judiciary from letting offenders “slide” with sentences that really have no teeth. Therefore, minimum sentencing/penalty guidelines need to become more robust. Consistent and Persistent violators cannot go on feeling like they’ll take the “slap on the wrist” for their negligence. These offenses have broad and damaging effects on the community and the penalties do not adequately reflect the seriousness of the offense.

I believe that addressing the issues mentioned above in my comments, will be a huge step forward in battling the pervasive issues surrounding Blight.

Thank you for your attention!