



Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro announces a 10-year economic strategy for the state at OraSure Technologies in Bethlehem. PHOTO/PACAST

Gov Shapiro announces ten-year economic strategy

Stacy Wescoe// January 30, 2024//

HIGHLIGHTS OF GOVERNOR'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY FOR PA:

- \$3.5 million investment will launch the new Pennsylvania Regional Challenge
- \$25 million for the Main Street Matters program PA SITES will provide
- \$10 million in grant funding to conduct site assessments and prepare them for remediation
- \$1.2 billion in private sector investment, significantly cutting down business licensing time

Saying that he is “bullish” on the Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro came to Bethlehem’s OraSure Technologies Tuesday to announce the first statewide economic development strategy in nearly two decades.

“This is a region on the rise, and it is all because you have all put together a plan in the Lehigh Valley and you have consistently executed it every step of the way,” Shapiro said

as he announced the strategy to more than 50 business leaders, elected officials, and other dignitaries, including several members of his cabinet at the global life sciences manufacturing company.

The new ten-year strategy was designed to capitalize on the state's strengths and reignite our economy.

"For too long, Pennsylvania's neighboring states have invested and focused on economic development while our commonwealth has lacked a targeted game plan and serious investment," said Shapiro. "With this plan, for the first time in nearly two decades, Pennsylvania has a serious economic development strategy that brings together our private and public sectors, our highly skilled workers, and our worldclass universities.

He said there are more than 23 Fortune 500 companies and over 1 million small businesses in the state as well as 190,000 skilled graduates produced by Pennsylvania's colleges and universities every year.

However, Pennsylvania faces critical workforce challenges.

He said there are unnecessary barriers to success for new startups and tech spinoffs, and there are disparities in economic performance among regions of the state, as well as a lack of targeted, meaningful focus on the key industries that drive the state economy's growth.

Shapiro said his administration has secured \$1.2 billion in private sector investment, significantly cutting down business licensing time, and rethinking the way government can work at the speed of business in his first year.

His newly announced plan sets forth five goals for the state to invest in economic growth to compete and prioritize economic development investments that capitalize on Pennsylvania's strengths and result in real opportunities for businesses. On Feb. 6, Shapiro will give his annual budget address. His Fiscal Year 2024-25 budget will call for investments directly tied back to this ten-year strategy.

His plans include a major investment in site development to bring more commercial and industrial sites online and ensure companies have options for attractive business to where they can thrive in Pennsylvania.

The administration also recently launched a new pilot program called PA SITES to provide \$10 million in grant funding to conduct site assessments and prepare them for remediation.

New innovation funding that provides support for start-ups and entrepreneurs will be in the budget as well as an additional \$10 million for the Agriculture Innovation Program to support innovation in our agricultural industry.

A \$3.5 million investment will launch the new Pennsylvania Regional Challenge, which will incentivize regional growth, and support communities by investing funds into the development of comprehensive strategies to propel entire regions forward.

There will be \$25 million for the Main Street Matters program, to support small businesses and commercial corridors. This new program will build upon and modernize the Keystone Communities program.

“If we are going to be competitive in attracting new businesses and helping Pennsylvania businesses grow, then we need to invest in economic development,” said Shapiro. “Over the last five years Ohio, New York, and New Jersey all committed far more resources to economic development than Pennsylvania.

Based on data-driven analysis, the Shapiro Administration will focus resources on agriculture, energy, life sciences, manufacturing and robotics and technology.

“To compete nationally and globally, Pennsylvania must make aggressive investments in economic development,” said DCED Secretary Rick Siger. “Our competition has long been committed to investing in sustaining growth, jobs, and innovation – and those efforts have allowed them to surpass Pennsylvania for far too long. But we’re no longer accepting the status quo and hiding from these challenges.

OraSure President and CEO Carrie Eglinton Manner, said she supported the governor’s plans.

“It’s long overdue for the state to have a comprehensive and strategic approach that will help all the regions of Pennsylvania thrive and prosper in a competitive world,” said Eglinton Manner. “At OraSure, we are proud of our legacy and energized about what lies ahead for us, and this new plan announced today by the governor increases our optimism and confidence as we look to the future.”

Don Cunningham, president and CEO of Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corp. was among those speaking at the event. "It's long overdue for the state to have a comprehensive and strategic approach to economic growth – backed up by strong and committed leadership and resources," Cunningham said. "You don't win in the world of business or sports or anything without a good strategic focus, dogged leadership, and resources. This is a smart plan – a practical approach to economic growth that capitalizes on the state's assets and its people while bringing us into the real world of 21st Century competition for jobs, new businesses, new sectors, and the skills development of our people – our most important asset."

Cunningham noted that the Lehigh Valley set a record for Gross Domestic Product in 2022, the most-recent data available, at \$50.2 billion. He said advanced manufacturing at companies such as OraSure Technologies continues to be a leading economic driver, with manufacturing contributing \$8.1 billion, or 16%, of the region's GDP.

Nationally, manufacturing makes up 12% of GDP.