

Northampton County is Open for Business, County Executive Says in State of the County Address



By Paul Muschick

Northampton County is prospering but has challenges ahead and must prioritize strengthening the middle class by providing quality jobs and a quality place to live, County Executive Lamont McClure said during his annual State of the County address.

“Our future is green,” McClure, who is in his second term, told more than 200 people at Historic Hotel Bethlehem on May 24. “But what does that mean? ... Well, my friends, green is the color of nature. And green is the color of money. And green is a light that tells us to go forward into the future.”

The event was hosted by Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corp. (LVEDC). Northampton County partners with LVEDC, and McClure is a member of LVEDC’s Board of Directors.

McClure offered several examples of how the county has flourished in the last six years, including:

Ranking fifth in median household income among Pennsylvania’s 67 counties

Investment of \$25 million to preserve farmland, open space, and environmentally sensitive land by the end of his current term

Construction of three new county parks totaling more than 300 acres

Keeping Gracedale, the county nursing home, open and in

county control

Balancing five consecutive budgets, and cutting property taxes in 2022

“What the tax cut did was signal to business, small and large, that we were open for business,” McClure said. “What it signaled to our homeowners, who were beleaguered by ever-rising real estate property taxes, is that we were on their side.”

While being able to boast of overflowing successes, Northampton County cannot be complacent, McClure said.

He said more must be done to protect the environment by improving air quality and the quality of the Lehigh River. More affordable housing is needed. The scourge of deadly fentanyl must be eradicated. Broadband internet must be available universally. Passenger rail service must connect the Lehigh Valley to New York City.

And, McClure said, the construction of new warehouses should not be incentivized with tax credits. “They’ll come here without tax breaks.”

Because the Lehigh Valley is within a day’s drive of one-third of the U.S. population, the region is a prime location for distribution facilities.

There is “nothing inherently bad” about warehouses, McClure said. He touted the presence of iconic logistics brands such as FedEx, UPS, and Amazon.

“They pay taxes. They employ people. It’s good for us,” he said.

But there are enough warehouses, he said: “We’re done.”

McClure cautioned that “not all big boxes are warehouses.” He said many hold manufacturing operations, such as Bowery Farming, which he described as a “futuristic farm” and “an amazing place.”

Bowery, the largest vertical farming company in America, opened in Bethlehem in 2022. It is anticipated to create at least 70 full-time jobs and invest \$30 million.

“It’s exactly the kind of businesses we want going forward,” McClure said.

He said some warehouses are necessary, including Martin Guitars’, which stores imported wood in a temperature-controlled environment.

“Without this building here, with its capabilities, we might lose iconic manufacturing. That’s the kind of businesses we want to retain. We want to attract the Bowerys and retain the Martins. That’s what we want to do. That’s how we will strengthen our middle class,” McClure said.

Workforce Board Lehigh Valley was the Presenting Sponsor for the State of Northampton County event. BSI Corporate Benefits was the Platinum Sponsor. Lehigh Valley International Airport was the Gold Sponsor.



Applications Being Accepted Critical Home Repair Program

MISSION

Warren County Habitat for Humanity's Critical Home Repair Program strives to keep existing homeowners in their homes safely and affordably by providing necessary repairs such as roof repairs, electrical, plumbing, interior damage, exterior damage and more.



Receipt Deadline for Applications is:

3:00 PM, June 20th 2023

Visit: warrenhabitat.org/programs for more information

Warren County Habitat for Humanity is seeking low or moderate income homeowners with household income below maximum levels noted, based on family size:

Family Size	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Maximum Income (\$)	62,600	71,550	80,500	89,400	96,600	103,750	110,900	118,050

*Must be less than 80% (median) of the 2022 median income in Warren County, NJ

Other Requirements:

1. You must reside within Warren County NJ.
2. You must occupy the home as your primary residence.
3. Applicant must demonstrate willingness to partner (*sweat equity*) and an ability to pay for the project. The affiliate can provide project cost forgiveness based on family income. (*These criteria are subject to change*).
4. Applicant must have a need for the repair(s) requested.
5. Homeowner(s) must be current on existing mortgage, homeowner's insurance, and property taxes
6. Homeowners must meet all federal guidelines for projects that require a loan.

Note: Veterans with proof of an honorable discharge will receive a 10% discount on services.

For application or more information go to:

**www.warrenhabitat.org or
call 908-835-1300 x16**

