

WEST READING ON THE ROAD TO REVITALIZATION

A COMMUNITY SEEKS HOMEOWNERS

In the late 1990s, West Reading's commercial area started to show its age in a state of sharp decline. Crime and blight began to creep into the borough. Properties in poor condition kept homebuyers away, residents were becoming increasingly dependent on public assistance, the real estate market was in decline, and public infrastructure was deteriorating. The neighborhood surrounding the commercial district showed signs of deferred maintenance and neglect, with cracked sidewalks and broken curbs.

The West Reading Borough Council created the West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation (WRCRF) in 1997 to address the issues plaguing the community, with the ultimate goal of creating homeowners, improving the housing stock, beautifying the streetscape, increasing safety, and energizing residents.

PARTNERSHIPS AND PROGRAMS IGNITE CHANGE

In 2007, the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) designated the West Reading Elm Street Program to combat and reverse the mounting negative trends and blight. Through this Elm Street designation, WRCRF received a total of \$962,500 in DCED funding from 2007-2011 that focused on the Ten Points neighborhood. From 2012-2017, WRCRF focused on the adjacent Center Point neighborhood, with the help of DCED and many other partners. DCED's support has been instrumental in attracting additional resources and support for WRCRF's efforts across the private, public, and nonprofit sources. As of 2017, the organization has leveraged \$1.9 million in funding from these other sources.

WRCRF used the funding to support a variety of revitalization programs. Through the Property Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resell (PARR) program, the foundation buys and modernizes foreclosed properties, then sells them at market price to homeowners who have a vested interest in the community. Recognizing that a neighborhood with well-maintained and attractive properties reflects confidence in the future of a community, WRCRF also runs a Façade Improvement Program. As part of the Paint the Town program, community members paint the front facades of properties in bright, three-color schemes to make the neighborhood unique and improve curb appeal. WRCRF has also concentrated on creating murals around the community. Adding beauty and creating a visually interesting environment is key to a revitalization strategy — it attracts and retains homeowners and young professionals who value a walkable community.



West Reading, PA

CASE STUDY



COMMUNITY
West Reading

REGION
Berks County (Southeast PA)

POPULATION
4,212

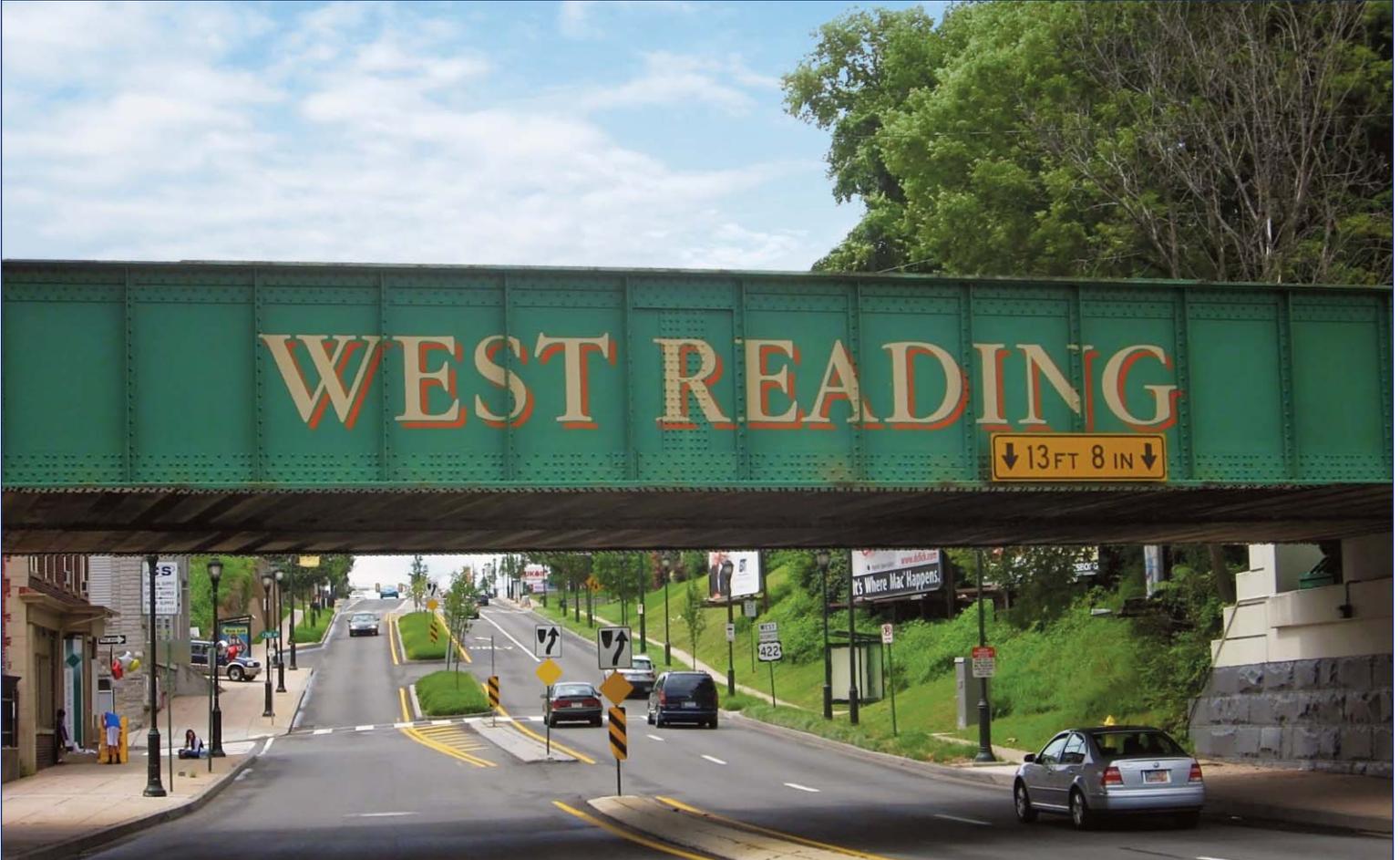
IMPACT

- \$2.5-million investment
- 14 façade grants
- 82 properties painted
- 13 murals created

“Beauty and design are just two of the elements we’re utilizing to make our community distinct, attractive, and a place to live happy. People want common spaces that foster a greater sense of belonging and connection, and we’re doing everything we can to bring this to West Reading.”

— Dean R. Rohrbach,
Program Manager,
West Reading Community
Revitalization Foundation

WEST READING



A PLACE TO LIVE HAPPY

Since 2007, the Elm Street program's \$2.5-million investment in the eight-square, block-target area has actively combatted blight, crime, indifference, and disinvestment. WRCRF has not only improved the neighborhood appearance and appeal through long-lasting improvements, but also has built cohesiveness and community among residents. They see long-term problems mitigated and highly visible projects changing their neighborhood before their eyes.

While the median price of homeowner-purchased homes has increased and the bank sales of foreclosed properties have decreased, there are many intangible benefits as well: residents putting out plants, decorating for the holidays, and accepting new residents into the neighborhood. As West Reading grows, the revitalization efforts will only continue to make this a community in which residents can live happy.

Keystone Communities Program

The Keystone Communities (KC) program encourages partnerships between the public and private sectors that jointly support local revitalization initiatives for growth and stability of neighborhoods and communities; social and economic diversity; and a strong and secure quality of life. The program allows communities to tailor the assistance to meet their needs. Visit dced.pa.gov/kcp to learn more.