

CRE Consulting Corps: *Making a Difference in Oxford Township*

The Oxford assignment was so interesting because the issues the township faced are shared by many other communities. What we found is that solutions do exist.

George E. Grace, CRE, Mohr Partners, New York — Panelist



CLIENT: New Jersey Future (NJF), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, promotes responsible land-use policies and economic development. NJF engaged the CRE Consulting Corps to develop strategy for revitalizing the downtown area of Oxford Township in New Jersey.

Nestled in the wooded foothills of the Appalachian chain, the township provides a convenient gateway for outdoor recreation from trail-biking to fly-fishing. The township is also home to a significant historic collection of homes, furnaces, and foundries relating to the nascent American steel industry of the late 18th to mid-19th century. Oxford Township is located in the New Jersey Highlands, an area governed by a regional water protection plan.



Built in 1741, the historic Oxford Furnace was used for smelting iron.

CHALLENGE: Oxford Township in Warren County is like many other rural and suburban communities whose original growth was based on an industry that has either

moved elsewhere or no longer exists. The resulting exodus of taxpayers and shoppers has created a downward spiral from which it is difficult to recover. The challenge to the CRE Consulting Corps was to evaluate the downtown area's development potential, help the township articulate a vision of a vibrant community center, and identify strategies and actions to achieve that vision. Additionally, the entire process was to be documented so that New Jersey Future could create a template to assist other communities facing similar challenges.



Oxford Township is home to a significant collection of historic buildings.

ASSESSMENT: Prior to visiting Oxford Township, the consulting team worked with township officials and New Jersey Future to prepare a pre-site visit briefing packet and identify the stakeholders that should be interviewed on site. In April, a five-member team convened in Oxford for five days. The team gathered and reviewed market information; interviewed town leaders and citizens; participated in a SWOT analysis; toured the township by car and on foot; and inspected neighboring communities.



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RECOMMENDATIONS: The team described a vision for Oxford Township, positioning it as a “pedestrian friendly” town with a vibrant downtown, conveniently linked to existing and new development, while integrated and accessible to natural resources and historic sites. In essence, the team believed that by leveraging the assets it already has, Oxford Township could transition from a *byway* to a *destination*.

The consulting team urged the township to pursue strategies that exploit its inherent strengths: its large tracts of land that could enhance parks or spur development, the region’s rich history, and its proximity to nature, small town ambience, sound public infrastructure, and the creative, enthusiastic community willing to work hard to achieve the vision.

The team provided a comprehensive list of both short- and long-term recommendations. Generally their recommendations fell into four categories: branding, land management, business attraction, and downtown development.

The report covers an incredible amount of territory and will provide Oxford with some excellent insights and very useful strategy recommendations. We congratulate the team on a comprehensive and insightful product.

David Kutner, Planning Manager, New Jersey Future



Members of the CRE consulting team with Oxford Township Mayor Marc Pasquini.

TEAM: The team was led by **Barton DeLacy, CRE**, DeLacy Consulting, Chicago. Panelists were **Fred Campbell, CRE**, The Cascade Group, Madison, Wisc.; **Garner Chandler, CRE**, 30A Local Properties, Grayton Beach, Fla.; **George Grace, CRE**, Mohr Partners, New York; and **Walt Winius, CRE**, Integra Winius Realty Analysts, Phoenix.

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