

May 16, 2013

Senator David G. Argall, Chairman  
PA Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee

RE: Public Hearing/Future of Main and Elm Program  
May 16, 2013 – Jim Thorpe

Senator Argall,

I am the Borough Manager of the Borough of Catasauqua. I am sorry that I was unavailable to attend the public hearing in person and hope that you will accept these written comments in lieu of my appearance.

The Borough of Catasauqua is a small urban community in Lehigh County northeast of the City of Allentown. We're 1.3 square miles in size with a population of just under 6,500. Like many other communities of our configuration we have been struggling over the past many years to maintain and support our downtown, such as it is. Unlike some communities Catasauqua has no specifically delineated "downtown". Rather our main business district is centered on the T intersection of Front and Bridge Streets and consists almost exclusively of small "Mom and Pop" commercial establishments.

In our continuing effort to assist our existing businesses and attract new investment in the Borough, approximately 10 years ago we volunteered to participate in a Lehigh County sponsored project to study our downtown and undertake a visioning exercise. From the initial study and efforts, a multi-municipal borough business revitalization program involving nine communities in Lehigh and Northampton Counties was developed, partially funded by the state, the counties and the participating Boroughs. That program has been extremely successful in affording us the seed money and matching funds for other grants and private investment in our downtown. We have been able to provide façade improvement grants to at least six business establishments, we've installed various streetscape amenities including trash receptacles, planting urns, and other site amenities.

Our local business revitalization plan program, the Catasauqua Main Streets Program has continued this effort attracting additional members to the organization and branching out into other areas of the Borough as well providing similar streetscape amenities and opportunities for all of our businesses.

I understand the Committee is considering legislation which would continue funding for the program. I am writing in support of continued funding with conditions. The efforts of Catasauqua

Borough and our Catasauqua Main Streets Program have had modest, incremental success in maintaining our existing businesses and attracting several new enterprises over the past five years. These efforts have had a positive impact on our downtown and our Borough. Continuing this effort is critical to the economic vitality of the Borough. What I would suggest is that funding continue for a period of perhaps five years to help the programs mature. Perhaps funding at an annually decreasing level will both support our efforts and allow our program the time to further gain traction and become self-sufficient.

Not having a vibrant downtown hurts any community, Catasauqua included. Unfortunately the same weakness in the downtown economy also makes it difficult for the downtown Main Streets Program to be self-supporting. The Borough has provided up to \$10,000 each year to maintain the program because they cannot support themselves on their own. Much of this was a local match for other support from the State and the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce Foundation. The State's continued funding, even on an annually declining basis, coupled with the Borough's continued support of the program will afford the Catasauqua Main Streets Program the time and resources to better establish themselves.

The new businesses that have recently started in the Borough show that the program is working. Unfortunately Catasauqua Main Streets Program is not yet ready to be self-supporting. It is for that reason that they still need the financial support of the Borough and the State, in a stable, predictable funding pattern. They continue to undertake their own fundraising both from the local businesses as well as other agencies. As that fundraising effort becomes more successful their reliance on Borough and State funding can decrease. If they are given a specific time frame for the decrease of funding they will better plan their time and goal of self-sufficiency.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views and opinions to the Committee. If you have any questions or want to follow-up on any of the comments that I have made, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Eugene L. Goldfeder  
Borough Manager